

# Chapter Three

## *commentary*

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In chapter two, Paul has set forth God's purpose to bring together believing Jew and Gentile by bringing both to life from the grave of spiritual deadness through the divine outworking of His pure saving grace in Messiah Yeshua, being "made alive together with Messiah..." having "raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places" (2:5-6).

As such, within the body of Messiah, the *ekklesia* He promised to build, the covenant promise made to Abraham that in his Seed all the families or nations of the earth would be blessed, is realized, increasing more and more until it encompasses a host of people beyond number. In this way, the victory of God in Messiah through His Spirit is more and more manifested to the world by the *ekklesia* as we live out the very characteristics of the One Who is the Head and Sustainer of His people.

Likewise, Paul characterizes the Jewish people as "near" to the divine revelations given to Israel's prophets while describing the Gentile nations as "far," and that through the proclamation of the Gospel, both have been brought together in faith, as foretold by Isaiah, which Paul quotes in 2:17.

and He came and preached peace to you who were far away,  
and peace to those who were near. (Is 57:19)

Paul makes it clear that this is accomplished by divine grace, through the work of Messiah as applied by the Spirit to the elect, so that together Jew and non-Jew comprise the "household of God" (2:19) built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Yeshua Messiah Himself as the cornerstone. What is more, in the previous chapter Paul emphasizes that this "household of God" is still being built, so that in Yeshua "the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord" (2:21), the very "dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

It is with these profound and glorious truths in mind that Paul continues his epistle in chapter three, in which he continues to emphasize the unity of all who are called to be part of the *ekklesia*. For if we all were "dead in our trespasses and sins" (2:1) and were all "made alive together with Messiah," then all that we are and hope to be flows from

God's pure and matchless grace. If we have ability and gifts to accomplish the work He has given us to do, we have these, not of ourselves, but as direct gifts of God's grace, secured by Yeshua's selfless sacrifice on our behalf, and applied to us by the gracious work of the Spirit. Therefore, in serving one another, we do so that our Savior might be honored and glorified, for in serving one another with this clearly in mind, we are truly serving the very One Who redeemed us.

As we come to chapter 3, we encounter something that is not uncommon in Paul's writings, that is, a long "run-on" sentence. In fact, 3:2-13 is actually one long sentence in which Paul gives further explanations as the impetus for his own prayers offered on behalf of the believers to whom he writes. We are alerted to this by the fact that he begins v. 1 with "For this reason..." and then repeats "For this reason..." in v. 14 to signal that he has returned to his original subject.

### **1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Messiah Yeshua for the sake of you Gentiles—**

"For this reason" (Τούτου χάριν, *toutou xarin*) is a truncated phrase that is finally completed in v. 14, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father..." Here, in our context, Paul goes on to explain why he continues in prayer for those to whom he is writing this epistle. And what is the "reason" that forms a regular impetus for Paul's prayers on their behalf? It is the truths he has emphasized in the previous context, but primarily this core truth, that God, through the outpouring of His Spirit, had initiated the time in earth's history when the ingathering of the nations would commence in earnest. And this is why Paul felt the need to digress in order to give witness of how his own imprisonment was not, as some undoubtedly were saying, an indication that God was against him, but rather, that he was proclaiming the genuine truth of the Gospel which was being received by Gentiles in large numbers. This signaled that the plan of God to bless all the nations had begun in unparalleled measures.

*I, Paul, the prisoner of Messiah Yeshua...* – Repeating his name, Paul, most likely was done to emphasize his authority as one of Yeshua's chosen apostles. What he is writing is not of his own invention, but carries the very authority of Yeshua Himself, for it was Yeshua Who called him and appointed him to be an apostle carrying the Messiah's message. Here, once again, we are called to affirm the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, both the Tanach and the Apostolic Scriptures as the very word of God given to us.

Note carefully that Paul does not primarily attribute his current imprisonment to the power of ungodly authorities, but he refers to himself as “the prisoner of Messiah Yeshua.”<sup>1</sup> On this Calvin remarks:

Paul’s imprisonment, which ought to have been held as a confirmation of his apostleship, was undoubtedly presented by his adversaries in an opposite light. He therefore points out to the Ephesians that his chains served to prove and to declare his calling; and that the only reason why he had been imprisoned was, that he had preached the gospel to the Gentiles. His unshaken firmness was no small additional proof that he had discharged his office in a proper manner.<sup>2</sup>

Surely Paul stands as a real example to all believers in this regard. For if, when walking in righteousness, we are harshly treated by those of the world who have no regard for God or for His ways, we should rightly understand that such ill treatment is actually sharing in the suffering which Yeshua Himself experienced. Paul uses such language in his epistle to the Colossians.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the *ekklesia*, in filling up what is lacking in Messiah’s afflictions. (Col 1:24)

Here, Paul views the “body of Messiah” to be in perfect union with Yeshua, so that Yeshua and His body suffer together. This is what he means by “what is lacking in Messiah’s afflictions,” i.e., the suffering that continues so long as the *ekklesia* exists in this fallen world.

*for the sake of you Gentiles*<sup>3</sup> – Paul’s current imprisonment came about because some saw him with a Gentile, Trophimus the Ephesian, and accused Paul of having brought him into the Temple courtyard (cf. Acts 21:27ff). Instead of distancing himself from the Gentiles after such measures were taken against him, Paul continued to minister to the Gentile believers and to proclaim the gospel to the Gentile communities. Note Paul’s words in his epistle to the Romans:

1 Some early manuscripts (⋈\* D\* F G 256 1319 1573 1852 2127 it<sup>d, g, o</sup> cop<sup>saMss</sup>, etc., have only τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

2 Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 246.

3 Cf. Philemon 1:9, where Paul also refers to himself as “a prisoner of Messiah Yeshua.”

But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Messiah Yeshua to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. (Rom 15:15–16)

But Paul’s calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles never diminished his equal burden for his own Jewish people. In Acts we read that Paul, arriving in Rome as a guarded criminal, invited the local Jewish leaders to visit him so that he could explain his circumstances. He explained that he had appealed to Caesar, not because he was rejecting his own Jewish people, but rather that he was suffering for Israel. He states to the Jewish leaders:

For this reason, therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel. (Acts 18:20)

Here we see that Paul’s calling to be sent as Yeshua’s apostle to the Gentiles in no way diminished his equal love and passion for the Jewish people. In commenting about our text, in which Paul claims to be a “prisoner for the sake of you Gentiles” and comparing it to his words in Acts 18:20, F. F. Bruce notes:

... there is no contradiction between the two representations of the reason for his being bound: in his eyes “the hope of Israel” looked forward to the coming of the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead, which had been fulfilled in the risen Lord whom he proclaimed. But, since he was called specifically to proclaim this risen Lord to the Gentiles, it was directly in consequence of his Gentile mission that he was bound.<sup>1</sup>

**2–3 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.**

Having begun with the obvious intention of conveying his prayers for those believers to whom the epistle was sent, Paul now regresses to give further explanation about his apostleship as being specifically

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1 F. F. Bruce, *Ephesians*, p. 309.

directed toward the Gentiles.

He refers to his being commissioned as an apostle of Yeshua as a “stewardship” (*οἰκονομία, oikonomia*) given for the good of those to whom he would minister. Our English word “economy” is based upon this Greek word *oikonomia*, which, in the Apostolic Scriptures, carries various related meanings: “management; an arrangement, order, or plan; program of instruction, training.”<sup>1</sup> We’ve seen this word in 1:10 and Paul uses it again in v. 9.<sup>2</sup> As in 1:10, the use of the word in our context refers directly to God as the “manager” or “administrator,” by Whose infinite wisdom and power is able to put into place the proper plan and arrangement in order to bring about all of His holy will.

Thus, Paul reminds not only his readers and us, but also himself as he writes, that the work he has been given to do in evangelizing and discipling the Gentile believers is sure to be successful, even in spite of his current imprisonment, for “the word of God is not imprisoned” (2Tim 2:9).

We too must take this truth to heart, for if we are serving in accordance with God’s revealed plan and purpose, even in difficult times we may be assured that our work, done God’s way and by His leading, will ultimately be successful for His glory and for accomplishing His purposes.

This stewardship given to the apostle refers, therefore, to his commissioning as an apostle, done directly by Yeshua Himself (Acts 9:4ff), as a gift of God’s grace. Once again, Paul emphasizes God’s grace as the fountain from which flows eternal salvation.

...that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery – Paul now speaks of a “mystery” (*μυστήριον, mustērion*) which was revealed to him and to the other apostles of Yeshua, and adds that he had previously written briefly concerning this mystery. The Greek word *προγράψω, prographō* can mean “to write previously” or also “written above in the same document.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, he could be referring to the earlier part of this epistle, for in 1:9–10 he speaks of the apostles as a group and gives a brief reference to “the mystery.”

1 BDAG, “*οἰκονομία*,” p. 697.

2 Other places in the Pauline corpus where *οἰκονομία* is used are: 1Cor 9:17; Col 1:25; 1Tim. 1:4.

3 See Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 100; BDAG, p. 867; Liddell & Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1973), p. 1473.

He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Messiah, things in the heavens and things on the earth. (Eph 1:9–10)

Or it is possible that he refers to another of his epistles in which he also references the “mystery” in brief, cf. Col 1:25; 1Cor 4:1. Some scholars consider the possibility that Paul may have written a very short letter which was never considered significant enough to be gathered together with his other, more substantial, epistles.

Regardless, the primary point the Apostle is making here, is that through divine revelation, something not fully known was revealed to the apostles of Yeshua and were thus given the duty to reveal this mystery. Here, once again, we see that the apostles who were chosen by Yeshua and given both the task and the ability to write as they were borne along by the Ruach HaKodesh, did themselves consider their work to be inspired and thus authoritative as divine scripture.

Now, in the verses which follow, Paul gives us the specifics of the “mystery” and thus its importance as a divinely given revelation.

**4–5 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Messiah, 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;**

Having made it known that his “insight” (σύνεσις, *sunesis*), that is, the understanding and knowledge of the “mystery” came as a direct revelation from God, he begins to unfold the mystery itself. This was not something that Paul had “discovered” on his own, but that was revealed to him and to the other apostles as well.

Here in our verse he describes it as “the mystery of Messiah.” This does not mean “the mystery *about* Messiah” but rather the mystery that is summed up in and made actual by the person and work of Yeshua as prophesied by the prophets of Israel. That is, that all things would be summed up in Yeshua.

Yet, though the prophets of Israel clearly prophesied about the Messiah, His sufferings, and the glory that would follow as a result of His salvific work (cf. 1Pet 1:10–12), there was something hidden from them. That which was revealed was what would take place in the coming of the Messiah as the promised redeemer, that is, the ultimate payment for sins to which all of the Temple sacrifices pointed and thus the ac-

complishment of eternal redemption for all who would be saved. But there was something that was not made know and this awaited the revelation given to the apostles and prophets after Yeshua's death, resurrection, and ascension.

*... as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;* – Here the word “holy” is added to the couplet “apostles and prophets,” a phrase found only here in the Scriptures. We should remember that the primary meaning of “holy,” is that of “set apart to God for a specific purpose.” In our context, it seems clear that Paul is emphasizing the fact that in one sense, the “specific purpose” for which the apostles and prophets were set apart was to announce the “mystery” and guide the believers in Yeshua to receive the message and obey its important truth.

**6–7 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.**

Finally Paul gives us the kernel of the mystery which was hidden in former generations, awaiting the coming of the Promised One and the eternal redemption He would accomplish for all, for all ages, who have put their trust in Him.

From the very beginning of God's revelation to mankind, it was made known that all the nations or families of the earth would be blessed by God through the promised seed of the woman, Chavah (Eve) and specifically through a descendant of Abraham, narrowed to a descendant of Judah, and finally from the lineage of David. So the ingathering of the Gentiles into the family of God was revealed to Israel's prophets and therefore known to those who heard their message, even if in the history of Israel, the idea of the inclusion of the Gentiles was rejected by many.

So the gathering of the elect from all the nations was promised by the prophets of Israel. But what was not made known was that the Gentile believers would become one with the Jewish believers and how such a oneness would be brought about. Surely from the time of Abraham it was known that people from every family or nation would be blessed by God, but that all would be blessed as a single family, the very household of God, and by what means this would become a reality, was the mystery which was made known only after the outpouring of the Ruach as promised by the ascended and victorious Messiah.