

Mystery of the Gentiles

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Yeshua:

The Apostle Paul spoke of several mysteries in his epistles to the church. These mysteries were in essence, God's hidden *wisdom* concealed from humanity, until the time He would choose for its revelation;ⁱ as it is written, *"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:7-8, NKJV).*ⁱⁱ

It is written, *"The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; By understanding He established the heavens" (Proverbs 3:19); "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3).* From these verses, we can conclude that the wisdom of God is both Christ and His creation.

Yeshua said to His disciples, *"It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (Matthew 13:11).* Yeshua and Paul were both speaking of the mystery of Christ—*Immanuel*, God appearing in the fleshⁱⁱⁱ to dwell with His people.^{iv}

Christ's sacrifice on the cross would ultimately bring atonement for the sin of all mankind, to those who believe, to the Jew first and then to the Greek (the Gentiles).^v However, the mystery is not exclusively Christ's sacrifice, but rather, it is written, Christ and His church. Paul said, *"This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32).*

Therefore, the greater part of this mystery is that God's church includes the Gentiles, as it is written, *"The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints [Israel]. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26-27).*

The word Gentile (*goyi*, or plural, *goyim*) is used in scripture to refer to the nations. In a general sense, the word *goyim* encompasses the nation of Israel; as it is written, *"Who is like Your people, like Israel, the one nation (goyi – גוי) on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people, to make for Himself a name" (1 Chronicles 17:21).*

However, the Lord also uses the word *goyim* to make a separation or sanctification between Israel (God's covenant nation) and all other nations. These *goyim* (Gentiles) were, at one time, outside of God's covenant promises, until Christ would come and extend His covenant of mercy with all flesh.^{vi} Therefore, the word is not derogatory, as some might construe, but merely

descriptive of God's salvific purposes for Israel to bring God's light to her surrounding (Gentile) nations.

The Apostle Paul made similar distinctions (not separations), purposefully to show how God was now joining the Gentile nations with His covenant nation—Israel.^{vii} Paul said: *"I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh [Israel] and save some of them."* (Romans 11:13-14).

While the Lord promised Abram that He would make of Him a great nation^{viii}—Israel—He later changed his name to Abraham and promised that he would become the father of many nations—the Gentiles. It is written, *"I will make you [Abram] a great nation [Israel]; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing"* (Genesis 12:2). *"As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you [Abraham], and you shall be a father of many nations"* (Genesis 17:4).

And, while the church was a mystery, Israel, on the other hand, was never hidden; as the Lord said, *"You [Israel] only have I known of all the families of the earth"* (Amos 3:2). It was Christ and His church that was hidden and is now revealed. Israel was to inherit the promises of Christ, to become the church and join the nations, the Gentiles, guiding them into God's everlasting covenant; as it is written, *"Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise"* (Galatians 4:28). *"That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel"* (Ephesians 3:6). It is amazing to see how the Gentiles have joined the saved remnant of Israel to become the "children of the promise." This is a great mystery.

"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel" (Ephesians 3:1-6).

While many Jews are still waiting for their Messiah, the understanding and full comprehension of "who is the Christ, the anointed one," is not manifest even amongst the greatest rabbinic scholars. Christ is still hidden to them, and for this reason, Paul said, *"I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in"* (Romans 11:25).

Israel's partial blindness is to Christ—Yeshua—for *"they [still] have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge"* (Romans 10:2). Yes, many Jews believe in God and even the Holy Spirit. However, they lack the knowledge of the Divine nature of Christ. His atoning works on the cross, and the promise and indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. And most significantly, they lack the

unveiled intimacy with their Heavenly Father. Blessed is the church, for flesh and blood has not revealed these to us, but our Father who is in heaven.^{ix}

The Jews are looking for a man and king from the lineage of David, expecting him to destroy their enemies and bring peace to Israel and the nations. They are not looking for God to appear in all His Divine Glory, nor are they looking for the Son of God to die and atone for their sins. Christ is still a mystery to Israel. And for this reason, Israel is still separated from the Gentiles.

Paul said, *"For He [Christ] Himself is our peace, who has made both [Jew and Gentile] one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace"* (Ephesians 2:14-15). And what was this law?

The Lord had commanded Israel, saying, *"You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son"* (Deuteronomy 7:2-3).

Under strict rabbinic law, the Jewish people were not only prohibited from intermarrying with their surrounding Gentile nations. They were required to remain separate from them. In doing so, Israel, under God's command, was to exclude the Gentiles from all of God's covenant promises. Yeshua said, *"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces"* (Matthew 7:6).

Edicts for Gentile impurity, which came with severe punishment, were later issued before the first Jewish war against Rome.^x The Apostle Peter was aware of this law when he received his infamous vision from the Lord; as it is written, *"You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean"* (Acts 10:28).

Therefore, Paul said, *"That at that time you [Gentiles] were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world"* (Ephesians 2:12). But now in Christ, the Lord has shown mercy to those who were previously separated from His covenant, as it is written, *"Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, And I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; Then I will say to those who were not My people, You are My people! And they shall say, You are my God!"* (Hosea 2:23).^{xi} This is a great mystery.

"And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, In you all the nations shall be blessed" (Galatians 3:8).

"Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law [Israel], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all" (Romans 4:16).

"And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

"So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8-9).

But there is one last part to this great mystery. Paul said, *"Through their [Israel's] fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles" (Romans 11:11). "For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Romans 11:25).*

And, here is the understanding. Israel's salvation is predicated on God's sovereign work of salvation amongst the Gentiles. Therefore, when the full number of Gentiles are brought into the Kingdom, the Lord has promised to save Israel.

"Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: AFTER THIS I WILL RETURN AND WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID [The Kingdom of Israel], WHICH HAS FALLEN DOWN; I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL SET IT UP; SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, EVEN ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME, SAYS THE LORD WHO DOES ALL THESE THINGS" (Acts 15:14-17).

God's mercy shown to the Gentiles because of Israel's rebellion will be shown to Israel because of the disobedience of the Gentiles— *"For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all" (Romans 11:32). "And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins" (Romans 11:26-27).*

This is the great mystery—the mystery of the Gentiles—that God's salvation, revealed in Christ, would first come to the Gentiles through Israel. And, then, Israel's salvation would be provoked by the Gentiles who are in Christ. *"So the last will be first, and the first last" (Matthew 20:16).*

Yes, *"This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Ephesians 5:32). "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).*

Amen!

ⁱ Colossians 2:2-3.

ⁱⁱ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Timothy 3:16.

^{iv} Ephesians 6:19.

^v Romans 1:16.

^{vi} Ephesians 2:11-13. Isaiah 55:1-3.

^{vii} Ephesians 2:14-18.

^{viii} Genesis 12:2.

^{ix} Matthew 16:17.

^x Klawans, Jonathan. *Notions of Gentile Impurity in Ancient Judaism*. Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Association for Jewish Studies.

^{xi} While this verse directly speaks to God's eternal covenant promises for Israel, even though she had previously asked Him for a bill of divorce, Paul also used this scripture to call the Gentiles into God's covenant promises; as it is written, *"Even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As He says also in Hosea: I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, You are not My people, There they shall be called sons of the living God"* (Romans 9:24-26).