

TOP SECRET: GOD'S SECRET REVEALED

Ephesians 3:1-7

Small children: "I've got a secret . . . !"

Paul tells the church at Ephesus that *HE* knows a secret.

God has kept a secret about His plan from previous generations that He decided to show to him, and to the other apostles and prophets in his day.

PRAISE FOR THEIR PART IN GOD'S PLAN 1:15-3:13

**PAUL PRAISES GOD FOR PRIVILEGE OF MINISTERING TO PAGAN GENTILES
3:1-13**

THE DISCOVERY OF THE SECRET 3:1-5

Paul begins to mention another request he brings to God as he prays for them ...

1 *For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—* ... but, before he can finish his thought, he interrupts himself to marvel at privilege God has given him of bringing this good news to Gentiles.

As he mentions his ministry to Gentiles, he is again overwhelmed by the thought of what an incredibly great thing God has done in opening the door to *US*! So he has to talk about it!

It had not been previously understood that God would send the gospel to pagan Gentiles, to make *us* members of one body with Israel.

So he explains just what a great privilege God has given to him: 2-3

God revealed it to Paul 3:1-3

God gave Paul a stewardship—He made him a steward—He entrusted to him the responsibility of communicating this mystery.

He was to lead in the extension of this ministry to pagan Gentiles.

God did NOT reveal it to previous generations 3:4-5a

This was *new* truth.

He refers to it as "*a mystery*"

"Mystery" in our thinking conjures up ideas of "whodunit?" murder stories, Sherlock Holmes, Agatha Christie, Nancy Drew, or the Hardy Boys.

That's not the biblical idea of a mystery.

A "mystery" in the biblical sense of the word is *a secret*.

— something God had not "uncovered" previously.

This truth wasn't revealed in O.T. times.

Israel thought God's promises were just for them.

It was no mystery that *salvation was by faith alone*.

That was clearly stated in the O.T. also.

Rom. 4 tells us Abraham was saved by faith:

"His faith was counted to him for righteousness."

It also quotes David's words:

"Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

Habakkuk tells us: *"The just live by faith."*

Further, it was no mystery that *Gentiles would be saved*.

Isaiah (60:3) states: *"Nations (Gentiles) will come to your light."*

Zechariah (2:11) adds: *"Many nations (Gentiles) will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people."*

Malachi (1:11) affirms: *"My name will be great among the nations from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations (Gentiles)."*

Israel never understood the part of God's promises that indicated the nations were to receive blessing through them and that they were to reveal the light to pagan nations living in darkness around them.

But it wasn't because that truth wasn't revealed.

They wanted all the blessings, without the responsibilities of godly living and of telling the nations about the greatness of their God
– so pagan peoples would join them in worshiping Him!

But that was *old* news!

However, Paul indicates that God has revealed a *new* truth to him.

But he wasn't the **ONLY ONE** to whom God revealed it!

To whom else did God reveal it? **3:5b**

God DID reveal it to the apostles and prophets 3:5b

If you go back to **Acts 10**, you'll see where God revealed it to Peter.

In **v. 34** it dawns on him: *"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism 35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."*

In **v. 44**, these Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit, just like the rest of the church did, and in **v. 47** Peter asks: *47 "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? **They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.** 48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ."*

In **ch. 11**, Peter carried this *new* truth to church leaders in Jerusalem.

They criticize him because he went into a pagan house and ate.

So Peter explains how God took him there.

He explains the vision he received.

God revealed that Jewish/Gentile relationship has changed

Gentiles are no longer unclean.

God has declared them "clean."

Then he tells what happened at Cornelius' house.

v. 15 affirms that when he began to speak, *they received the Holy Spirit* as apostles did in Jerusalem **"at the beginning,"** when the Holy Spirit came and gave birth to the church

Peter responds in **v. 17**: *"So if God gave them **the same gift** as he gave us, who was I to think that I could oppose God."*

Based on Peter's testimony to the work of Holy Spirit in Cornelius' house, **the apostles and prophets** acknowledge that God has opened the door for Gentiles also as part of the family of God.

So Peter, and other apostles and prophets, came to understand that God is doing something *NEW*—unrevealed previously —among pagan Gentiles.

That's why Paul says God has now revealed it to the apostles and prophets.

Shortly thereafter, Jewish believers—who had been scattered by persecution —carried the gospel to other parts of the world.

Most preached to Jews, but some went to pagan gentiles and many of them believed also.

When word got back to Jerusalem, the leaders sent Barnabas to check it out.

He discovered a growing movement of believers being added to the people of God in other places.

After affirming God's work there, Barnabas went to get Paul and get him involved in what God was **already** doing there.

As a final step in acknowledging God's new plan, the church affirmed that this was the ministry to which God had called Barnabas and Saul, and commissioned them to go carry it out, under Barnabas' leadership, at first.

God gave this revelation directly to Paul first (in Acts 9), but He affirmed that message directly to Peter, and to the other apostles and prophets as well—in Acts 10-11.

Now Paul expresses praise to God for having called him to this ministry
[So, specifically what is the new ministry—the mystery that God has now revealed? vv. **6-7**]

THE CONTENT OF THE SECRET 3:6

The Good News has been extended to us pagan Gentiles.

We have now received **three benefits**:

1. We are heirs together (with Israel)

Actually doesn't say "*with Israel*"

He already indicated that we weren't heirs previously

Now he says: We have become "co-heirs"

We are all heirs together of God's promised inheritance.

2. We are members together of one body

3. We are sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus

"*partakers*" "*participants*"

Previously God's promises had nothing to do with us.

Now we are partakers—we share in these promises.

All three focus around the word "together"

We've been included—we are now "insiders" with the people of God

We've been brought near, and made part of God's family.

New truth: *there's a new family* —made of both Jews and Gentiles.

Peter says its beginning was at Pentecost – when they received the Spirit.

THE PRIVILEGE OF PROCLAIMING THE SECRET 3:7

Paul is *excited* that God has given him this privilege

Paul considers it a privilege to be a servant

Paul considers this ministry to be a gift of God's grace

Paul considers this to be the outworking of God's power in Him

God has given him a gift.

It is God's grace (His "unmerited favor") shown to him.

It is the outworking of God's power in him.

He is excited that he has been allowed to give his life to promoting this message *among us Gentiles*.

If Paul, as a Jew, is that excited about taking the message to us, how excited should we be about taking the message to our own people—or even *other peoples* who have never heard this good news?

What an exciting privilege – to proclaim to pagan Gentiles – who used to be outsiders – that God has made a way to include *US* in His plan!

Are you excited? Have you realized what a great privilege God has given us?!!

For centuries God's people always communicated to pagans that we pagan Gentiles were on the *OUTSIDE!*—We weren't part of God's plan.

God has given *US* the privilege of telling people that God has made a way for *US* to be part of His family.

We can receive eternal life by trusting Christ alone!

Are *WE* really excited about this privilege?!!

What are we doing about it? Are we telling people what God has done for us?