

Lesson 23 - The Dispensation of Grace

As we concluded lesson 22, we saw that Israel had committed the unpardonable sin in Acts 7. The Gentiles had rebelled against God way back in Genesis 11. The time was now ripe for judgement. Yet we are now living hundreds of years later and God's judgement has still not come upon the earth! What happened after Acts 7? Why hasn't God poured out His wrath upon the earth after all these hundreds of years? The answer to these questions can be found in Paul's epistles.

A New Dispensation

We will study several passages in Paul's epistles. However, let us first briefly answer the questions posed above. Instead of pouring out His wrath after Stephen was stoned in Acts 7, God introduced a new dispensation---the dispensation of grace. Under the former dispensation, God would certainly have dealt with the earth in anger. [He will yet do this in the future.]

However, in the new dispensation God would pour out His grace. God revealed a new message (the mystery) to Paul, the apostle. We are now living in the dispensation of grace; it has continued for about two thousand years already.

This present dispensation is much different from the previous dispensation:

Time Past

- Law
- Kingdom on earth promised
- The chosen nation is Israel
- The gospel of the kingdom

Now

- Grace
- The saved go to heaven
- No nation is favoured
- The gospel of grace

We will now support this by considering several passages in Paul's epistles.

Paul and the Gentiles

In Romans 11:13, Paul wrote: "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office." This is a very significant statement! No one else in the Bible claims to be an apostle of the Gentiles. Paul was given a special message about the Gentiles. We learned in lesson 20 that Jesus Christ was not sent to the Gentiles, but only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). Jesus Christ came as a minister of "the circumcision" (Romans 15:8). Paul, however, writes: "That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles . . ." (Romans 15:15-16). Jesus Christ sent Paul to minister to the Gentiles. If the Word of God says that Paul's office is magnified, we must not diminish it!

The Mystery

It is impossible to understand the Bible without understanding "the mystery." The word "mystery" in the Bible does not mean mysterious or strange. The mystery is a message previously hidden, but now made known. Read the following verse carefully and notice the meaning of the word "mystery." "Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25).

No one in the Old Testament knew the mystery. Neither did the twelve apostles during Christ's ministry on earth. No one knew the mystery until it was revealed to Paul. It had been "kept secret since the world began."

Paul speaks of this mystery often. "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints" (Read Colossians 1:24-27). God did not suddenly come up with a new plan in Acts 7. He had promised eternal life to Gentiles "before the world began" (Titus 1:2). (This was a promise that God made to Himself, since no one was present before the world began except the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.) God kept this a secret, "But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me [Paul] according to the commandment of God our Saviour" (Titus 1:3). Though planned before the world began, the dispensation of grace was not revealed until the proper time (the "due times"). God then committed this message to Paul. We will now study more about the content of "the mystery."



Source: https://filedn.com/ID0GfuMvTstXgqaJfpLL87S/sweet_images/jpg/55/55_2Ti_04_01_RG.jpg - for illustration purposes of Paul writing his letters only

The Fall of Israel

Romans 11:11 tells us that Israel has fallen and "through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles." The fall of Israel has become "the riches of the world" (Romans 11:12). The "casting away" of Israel resulted in "the reconciling of the world" (Romans 11:15). Old Testament teaching is that salvation will come to the Gentiles through the rise of Israel (Isaiah 60:1-3).

However, in Romans 11 Paul teaches that salvation has come to the Gentiles through the fall of Israel. This is something new! This is part of the mystery (Romans 11:25).

Why a Mystery?

Why did God keep a message secret since the world began; not revealing it to anyone before Paul? This is what Paul explains in 1 Corinthians. "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:7-8). Satan is "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2).

When Jesus Christ was crucified, Satan and the other "princes of this world" thought that they had won the victory over Christ. They did not know that Christ's death would pay the penalty for all men's sins and open the way for salvation by grace for all men. Had Satan known about the salvation that the Cross would bring, he would have tried to prevent the crucifixion! However, Satan did not know this information! He did not learn about it from the Old Testament prophets, the twelve apostles, or anyone else. This knowledge was hidden, because God had not yet revealed the mystery! Satan fell into a trap set by the wisdom of God. Only later, when the mystery was revealed to Paul, did Satan realise that the cross was not a victory for him, but was his greatest defeat in history! This is why God kept "the mystery" a secret for all those years.

There are many denominations, sects, and cults within Christendom. All of them claim to be preaching Jesus Christ. Yet, they have vastly different messages about the Lord. It is not enough simply to preach Jesus Christ.

We must preach Jesus Christ "according to the revelation of the mystery" (Romans 16:25). Jesus Christ is no longer in a state of humiliation as He was when on earth. Today, He does not get tired or hungry. No one can spit at Him, slap Him, place a crown of thorns on His head, or crucify Him today.

He is now the risen and ascended Lord "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1:21). He is now the Head of the Church, the Body of Christ. We learn all of this in the mystery!

[In the next two lessons we will study two very important passages concerning Paul and the mystery.]

Review Questions Lesson 23 - The Dispensation of Grace

True or False

1. Israel committed the unpardonable sin when the Jews crucified Christ.
2. There is very little difference between this dispensation and the previous dispensation.
3. You will never understand the Bible unless you understand the mystery revealed to Paul.
4. God favours Israel above all nations today.

Multiple Choice

5. We can know that a church is teaching the truth if:
 - a) they claim to be Christian
 - b) they teach about Jesus Christ
 - c) they preach Jesus Christ according to the mystery
 - d) they teach that Jesus Christ is Lord
6. After Israel stoned Stephen in Acts 7:
 - a) God introduced the dispensation of grace
 - b) God poured out His wrath on the earth
 - c) God established His kingdom on earth
 - d) They crucified the Lord
7. In Romans 11:13 Paul said:
 - a) that he was an apostle to Israel
 - b) that he was the apostle of the Gentiles
 - c) that his office of apostleship was not important
 - d) that Peter was the apostle of the Gentiles

Fill in the Blanks

8. The _____ was hidden until it was revealed to Paul.
9. ". . . for had they known it, they would not have _____ the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).
10. The _____ rebelled against God in Genesis 11.