

Welcome to Promise Land Bible Church  
We're glad you're here!



An open book is shown from a low angle, looking up at the pages. The pages are filled with small, dense text, likely a Bible. The book is set against a bright blue sky with wispy white clouds. The text is centered over the book's pages.

# **I Know A Secret**

**Scripture text: Ephesians 3**

Compare Ephesians 3:1 and 14.

***Ephesians 3:1** For this reason I, Paul, a **prisoner** for Christ Jesus on behalf of you **Gentiles**—*

***Ephesians 3:14** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,*

His use of the words “**prisoner**” and “**Gentiles**” leads him into this important explanation of the “**mystery of the church**,” and in this explanation, Paul shows us that the “mystery” is important to four different groups of persons.

**1. It Was Important to Paul (Eph. 3:1–5)**

This was the “dispensation” —or stewardship— that God had given him. And because Paul was a faithful steward, **he was now a prisoner in Rome.**

Like Joseph in the Old Testament, his faithful stewardship resulted in false arrest and imprisonment. But, in the end, **it brought great glory to God and salvation to Jews and Gentiles.**

## **It Was Important to the Gentiles (Eph. 3:6–8)**

In Ephesians 2:11–22, we discovered that Christ's work on the **cross accomplished much more than the salvation of individual sinners.**

**It reconciled Jews and Gentiles** to each other and to God. It is this truth that Paul presents here, and you can imagine what exciting news it would be!

**The truth of “the mystery” reveals to believing Gentiles that they have a wonderful new relationship through Jesus Christ.**

To begin with, **they are fellow-heirs** with the Jews and **share in the spiritual riches God** gave them because of His covenant with Abraham (Gal. 3:29).

In Christ, being a Jew or a Gentile is neither an asset nor a liability, **for together we share the riches of Christ**. The Gentiles are also fellow-members of the body of Christ, the church. **“There is one body”** (Eph. 4:4).

**Our human birth determines our racial distinctions, but our spiritual birth unites us as members of the same body** (1 Cor. 12:12–14).

**1 Corinthians 12:12-16** For just as the body is one and has many members, and **all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.** For in one Spirit we were all baptized into **one body**--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of **one Spirit.** For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

Christ is the Head of this body (Eph. 5:22–23), and each individual member shares in the ministry (Eph. 4:10–13).

Finally, **in their new relationship, the Gentiles are partakers of God's promises.** Once they were outside the covenant, with no claims on the promises of God (Eph. 2:12); **but now, in Christ, they share the promises of God with the believing Jews.**

In Romans 11:13–15, Paul explains that believing Gentiles share in the spiritual riches that God gave to Israel.



**Romans 11:11-15** So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?

But in Romans 11:1–12, Paul explains that God has not, because of the church, negated His promises to Israel. **The church today shares in the spiritual riches of Israel**, but one day God will restore His people and fulfill His promises concerning their land and their kingdom.

**“The mystery” not only gives believing Gentiles a new relationship, it also reveals that there is a new power available to them** (Eph. 3:7). This power is illustrated in the life of Paul. God saved him by grace and gave him a stewardship, a special ministry to the Gentiles.

But God also gave Paul the power to accomplish this ministry.

The word “working” here is **energeia** from which we get our word “energy.”

The word “power” is **dunamis** which gives us our words “dynamic” and “dynamite.”

Paul has already told us about this mighty power in Ephesians 1:19–23, and he will mention it again in Ephesians 3:20 and Ephesians 4:16. **The mighty resurrection power of Christ is available to us for daily life and service.**

Finally, there is available to the Gentiles new riches: **“the unsearchable riches of Christ”** (Eph. 3:8). Paul called them “exceeding riches” (Eph. 2:7) but here he describes them as **“unfathomable.”** The words can also be translated “untraceable,” which means that they are so vast you cannot discover their end. (Some students suggest that “untraceable” might also carry the idea that “the mystery” cannot be traced in the Old Testament since it was hidden by God.)

Are these riches available to every believer? Yes! In fact, Paul makes it clear that he himself had no special claim on God’s wealth, for he considered himself “less than the least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8).

The name Paul (Paulus) means “little” in Latin, and perhaps Paul bore this name because he realized how insignificant he really was (Acts 13:9). He calls himself “the least of the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:9), but at least he was an apostle, which is more than we can claim.

Here he calls himself, not “the least of all saints,” but “less than the least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8), and he later calls himself the “chief of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15).

**Understanding the deep truths of God’s Word does not give a man a big head; it gives him a broken and contrite heart.**

## **It Is Important to the Angels (Eph. 3:9–10)**

Perhaps at this point, you are asking yourself the question, “Why did God keep His secret about the church hidden for so many centuries?” Certainly the Old Testament clearly states that God will save the Gentiles through Israel, but **nowhere are we told that both Jews and Gentiles will form a new creation, the church, the body of Christ.**

It was this mystery that the Spirit revealed to Paul and other leaders in the early church, and **that was so difficult for the Jews to accept.**

Paul tells us that “the principalities and powers” **are also involved in this great secret.** God is “**educating**” **the angels by means of the church!** By “the principalities and powers,” Paul means the angelic beings created by God, both good and evil (Eph. 1:21; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:15).

Angels are created beings and are not omniscient. In fact, Peter indicates that during the Old Testament period, **the angels were curious about God’s plan of salvation then being worked out on earth** (1 Peter 1:10–12).

Certainly the angels rejoice at the repentance of a lost sinner (Luke 15:10); and Paul suggests that the angels watch the activities of the local assembly (1 Cor. 11:10). “We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels,” Paul writes (1 Cor. 4:9).

What, then, do the angels learn from the church?

“The manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:10). Certainly the angels know about the power of God as seen in His creation. But the wisdom of God as seen in His new creation, the church, is something new to them.



Unsaved men, including wise philosophers, look at God's plan of salvation and consider it "foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:18–31). But the angels watch the outworking of God's salvation, and **they praise His wisdom**. Paul calls it manifold wisdom, and this word carries the idea of "variegated" or "many-colored." This suggests the beauty and variety of God's wisdom in His great plan of salvation.

But there is another facet to this truth that must be explored.

What are the evil angels learning from God's "mystery"?

That their leader, Satan, does not have any wisdom! Satan knows the Bible, and he understood from the Old Testament Scriptures that the Savior would come, when He would come, how He would come, and where He would come.

Satan also understood why He would come, as far as redemption is concerned.

But nowhere in the Old Testament would Satan find any **prophecies concerning the church, “the mystery” of Jews and Gentiles united in one body!**

Satan could see unbelieving Jews rejecting their Messiah, and he could see Gentiles trusting the Messiah, but he could not see both believing Jews and Gentiles united in one body, **seated with Christ in the heavenlies, and completely victorious over Satan!**

**Had Satan known the far-reaching results of the Cross, no doubt he would have altered his plans accordingly.**

God hid this great plan “from the beginning of the world,” but now He wants “the mystery” to be known by His church.

And this is why He made Paul a “steward” of this great truth.

Ephesians 3:9 should read, “And to make all men see what is the stewardship of the mystery.”

Here is an amazing truth: **Now all believers are to be faithful stewards of this great truth!**

This “**sacred secret**” that was so important to Paul, and to the Gentiles, and to angels, **is now in our hands!**

# **It Should Be Important to Christians Today (Eph. 3:11–13)**

When God saved Paul, **He deposited with him the precious treasures of Gospel truth (1 Tim. 1:11).**

Paul in turn committed these truths to others, exhorting them to commit the truths to faithful men who would guard them and share them (2 Tim. 2:2).

“O Timothy! Keep that which is committed to thy trust!” (1 Tim. 6:20) At the close of his life, Paul would say, to the glory of God, “I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7).

During those apostolic days, the truths of the Gospel and **“the mystery”** were guarded, preached, and handed down to faithful men.

But a study of church history reveals that, **one by one**, many of the basic truths of the Word of God were lost during the centuries that followed. God had His faithful people—a minority—at all times, **but many of the great truths of the Word were buried under man-made theology, tradition, and ritual.**

Then, God’s Spirit began to open the eyes of seeking souls, and these great truths were unveiled again.

Martin Luther championed justification by faith. Other spiritual leaders rediscovered the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the glorious truth of the return of Jesus Christ, and the joy of the victorious Christian life.

In recent years, the truth of “the mystery” has again excited the hearts of God’s people. We rejoice that we are “all one in Christ Jesus.”

Most of us identify Napoleon Bonaparte as the would-be conqueror of Europe. But not many would name him as a patron of arts and sciences. Yet he was.

In July 1798, Napoleon began to occupy Egypt, but by September 1801, he was forced to get out. Those three years meant failure as far as his military and political plans were concerned, but they meant success in one area that greatly interested him—**archeology.**

For in August 1799, a Frenchman named Boussand discovered the **Rosetta Stone** about thirty miles from Alexandria. **This discovery gave to archeologists the key to understanding Egyptian hieroglyphics. It opened the door to modern Egyptian studies.**



“The mystery” is **God’s “Rosetta Stone.”** It is the key to what He promised in the Old Testament, what Christ did in the Gospels, what the early church did in the Book of Acts, what Paul and the other writers teach in the Epistles, and **what God will do as recorded in the Book of Revelation.**

God’s program today is not “the headship of Israel” (Deut. 28:1–13), but **the headship of Christ over His church.** We today are under a different “stewardship” from that of Moses and the prophets, and **we must be careful not to confuse what God has clarified.**

The reason many churches are weak and ineffective is **because they do not understand what they have in Christ.** And the cause of this is often spiritual leaders who are not good “stewards of the mystery.” Because they do not “**rightly divide the Word of truth**” (2 Tim. 2:15), **they confuse their people concerning their spiritual position in Christ, and they rob their people of the spiritual wealth in Christ.**

This great truth concerning the church is not a divine afterthought. **It is a part of God’s eternal purpose in Christ (Eph. 3:11).**

To ignore this truth is to sin against the Father who planned it, the Son whose death made it possible, and the Spirit who today seeks to work in our lives to accomplish what God has planned.

**When you understand this truth**, it gives you great confidence and faith (Eph. 3:12). When you know what God is doing in the world, and you work with Him, you can be sure that He will work in you and for you. **All of His divine resources are available to those who sincerely want to do His will and help Him accomplish His purposes on earth.**

The early church thought that the Gospel belonged to the Jews because it had come through them and to them first. **Until Peter, by divine direction, went to the Gentiles in Acts 10**, the Jewish believers thought that a Gentile had to become a Jew before he could become a Christian! **God's Spirit gradually revealed to the churches that God was doing a new thing**: He was calling out a people for His name from both the Jews and Gentiles (Acts 15:14). There are no national, racial, political, physical, or social distinctions in the church! "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

But an understanding of God's program in this present age **not only gives the believer confidence** toward God. It also **gives him courage** in the difficult circumstances of life. Paul's sufferings for the Gentiles would mean glory for the Gentiles. In the Old Testament age, when God's people obeyed, God blessed them materially, nationally, and physically (Deut. 28); and if they disobeyed, He withdrew these blessings.

**This is not the way He deals with the church today. Our blessings are spiritual, not material (Eph. 1:3); they have all been given to us completely in Christ.**

We appropriate them by faith; but if we disobey God, He does not revoke them. **We simply lose the enjoyment and the enrichment of them.** Paul was certainly a dedicated, Spirit-filled man; yet he was suffering as a prisoner. Paul made it clear that physical, material blessings are not always the experience of the dedicated Christian (2 Cor. 4:7–12; 11:23–12:10).

People who do not understand God's "mystery" in His church are trying to make spiritual progress with the wrong map. Or, to change the figure, they are trying to build with the wrong blueprints.

God's churches on this earth—the local assemblies—are not supposed to be either Gentile culture cliques or Jewish culture cliques. For a German church to refuse fellowship to a Swede is just as unscriptural as for a Jewish congregation to refuse a Gentile. **God's church is not to be shackled by culture, class, or any other physical distinction.** It is a spiritual entity that **must submit to the headship of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit.**

**Yes, God had a “secret”—but God does not want it to be a secret anymore!**

If you understand your wonderful position in Christ,  
**then live up to it**—and share the blessing with others.

This “secret” was important to Paul, to the Gentiles,  
and to the angels—**and it ought to be important to  
you and me today.**