

# Are the Church and the Rapture Mysteries?

By Robert I. Adams

Some expositors of the Scriptures assert that the church itself, and the rapture (catching up) of the church in the end time, are mysteries that were revealed to the apostle Paul. In accordance with this, they say the church and its catching up are not what Jesus told His disciples about when He taught them concerning the end time and His return.

We will examine if this is the case.

In Ephesians 3, Paul writes:

" . . . by revelation he [God] made known unto me the *mystery*, (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the *mystery* of Christ)" (Eph. 3:3-4).

Paul calls the mystery made known to him, "the mystery of Christ," which he wrote about in the first two chapters of his letter (cf. "as I wrote afore in few words"). Paul then goes on to say:

" . . . which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5).

Paul says the mystery of Christ was not only revealed to him, but also to Christ's other apostles and prophets.

Then Paul tells us what the mystery is:

" . . . that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his [God's] promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3:6).

Paul is saying the mystery he was given knowledge of is the inclusion of the Gentiles in the body of Christ, which is the church of Christ. Clearly, the mystery is not the church itself, which originally comprised of only Jewish believers.

The most notable of the apostles beside Paul, who received revelation of the mystery of the Gentiles being incorporated into the church, was the apostle Peter. God gave him a special vision about it in Acts 10 and caused him to preach the gospel to a Roman household.

In Ephesians 5, Paul writes of another aspect of the mystery:

"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and the two shall be one flesh. This is a great *mystery*: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:31-32).

Again, we see that the mystery is not the church itself, but the spiritual union between Christ and the church (cf. "the two shall be one").

In Colossians 1, Paul writes again about the mystery:

". . . the *mystery* which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this *mystery* among the Gentiles; which is Christ *in* you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26-27).

Paul says here the mystery concerns the believing Gentiles—their sharing in the hope of receiving glory (along with believing Jews). Again, it is evident the mystery is not the church itself, but is Christ "in" Gentile believers.

Concerning the church itself, Jesus was the One who revealed the concept of it. He said, "I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). He began with His first disciples.

At that time, the Jewish disciples of Jesus did not realize that Gentiles would become one with them in believing in Him. However, Jesus hinted at this when He said:

"And other sheep I have [Gentiles who would become believers] which are not of this fold [those who believed in Jesus among the Jews]; them also I must bring, and they will hear my voice; and there will be one flock [the church] and one shepherd [Jesus]" (John 10:16).

Then we have Christ's commission to His disciples:

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to *every creature*. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:15-16).

Here, Jesus alludes to Gentiles receiving the gospel message.

From what we have looked at, it is apparent "the mystery" was the inclusion of Gentiles in the church through faith in Christ. The church itself was evidently not a mystery revealed to the apostle Paul; Jesus Himself said He was going to construct it.

What about the rapture—the catching up of the church of Christ? Is that a mystery, which was revealed to the apostle Paul? In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul wrote:

"Behold, I shew you a *mystery*; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump" (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

It is readily seen that the mystery here is the transformation of the bodies of the believers still alive when Jesus comes. The mystery does not concern the actual catching up because it is not even mentioned in the passage. In addition, we see it is the act of being changed that will happen in the twinkling of an eye, not the gathering of the believers to meet Christ. Paul is simply telling here about what will immediately precede the gathering of the believers when Jesus returns. The transformation of the believers' bodies will make it possible for them to be gathered to Jesus in the clouds when He comes as Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 4, where he says:

“. . . we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17).

This gathering of the believers in the clouds was, however, first revealed by Jesus Himself. In Mark 13, He said:

“And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven” (Mark 13:26-27).

When Jesus comes and is visible in the clouds, those on the earth and from heaven who belong to Him will be gathered to Him by the angels. We can deduct from this that Jesus is saying the gathering of all the believers will take place in the clouds.

Jesus told us when this will happen. A couple of verses beforehand He said, “after that tribulation” (Mark 13:24), referring back to what He said five verses earlier:

“. . . in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be” (Mark 13:19).

In conclusion, we see that the mystery Paul received was an extended revelation concerning the inclusion of the Gentiles in the church, but this had already been revealed in essence to the apostle Peter and hinted at by Jesus during His earthly ministry. And Jesus was the first to reveal the concept of the actual church itself.

The mystery that was revealed to Paul was the changing of the bodies of the believers still alive at Christ’s return. But the actual catching up and gathering of the believers to meet Christ in the clouds after the resurrection and the changing of the bodies of the believers, was revealed by Christ Himself. And He said this would happen after the end time tribulation in conjunction with Him descending to the earth.

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