

## **Covenant and The Mystery**

by Oscar M. Baker

### **COVENANT AND THE MYSTERY - #1**

(From Vol. 22, #3, p. 249)

We are told in Gal. 3 that at that time the covenant God made with Abraham back in Gen. 12 was in no way affected or annulled by the law which came 430 years after at Sinai. The epistle to the Romans has much to say about Abraham and the covenant and the law.

The question then that comes to mind is the relation of the covenant made to Abraham and the mystery. Did the mystery annul the covenant? Did Abraham have any knowledge of the mystery? Will he have a part in it? The law was added to the covenant because of transgressions, or the great transgression (the worship of the Golden Calf). Was the dispensation of the mystery added to these things? Not many seem to know the answers to these questions. They are confused.

Peter had opened the doors of the kingdom to Israel at Pentecost in Acts 2. Again he opened the doors of the kingdom to Gentiles in Acts 10 at the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. But there is strong evidence that Paul closed these doors of the kingdom in Acts 28 and that Israel as a nation was set aside. How long was that setting aside going to last? Hos. 6:2 says this period is to be 2 days.

There is a vast amount of prophecy concerning Israel that has not been fulfilled yet today. And there are some people who think and teach that Israel is finished, written off the books and will never again be in God's favor. But what says the Book?

If Israel has been set aside now for 1,900 years, then what of their law, their rituals, and their obligations? What of the New Covenant which was promised to them and ratified by the blood of their Messiah whom they murdered? If they are now out of God's program, then certainly there must be a new and entirely different administration or dispensation in force today. Christendom with one voice says there has been no change of dispensation and that the new covenant has been sent to the Gentiles. But the Bible says the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles, not the new covenant (Acts 28:28).

Most of us have a lot to learn and to unlearn in regard to these things. Tradition is a veil that covers the eyes of Christendom today lest they should see the truth and give God the glory. And who is it that veils the eyes and blinds men to the truth? It is the god of this world, the evil one.

We have in these days revealed to us a mystery, a secret that had been hid in God from ages and generations, but made known for the first time by the apostle Paul. See his claim in Col 1:21-29. A special dispensation of grace was given to Paul alone that he might make known this wonderful gospel of the mystery. If that is true, if the Word of God is right, then Abraham never knew about it. It was no part of the promise; and that it was the adding of Gentiles to Israel and her hope, is utterly false, a lie.

Before the mystery was made known to Paul, the blessing upon Gentiles, as well as Jews, was Abrahamic, millennial, and even of the New Jerusalem, in character. The promise was still in effect. Salvation was still of the Jews. The earth was their hope (the New Jerusalem will be on the earth). But we must now turn to Romans to check this.

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## THE COVENANT AND THE MYSTERY #2

(from Vol. 22, #4, p. 253)

In 2 Cor. 3:6, Paul was still an able minister of the New Testament, not of the dispensation of the mystery yet. And now we open the epistle to the Romans, which undoubtedly was his last epistle before Ac 28:28. We look to see if there has been any change since 2 Cor 3:6. We find in Rom. 1:16 that Paul is still preaching the *gospel of Christ, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*. The Greek here, as in verse 14 above, refers to non-Jews or Gentiles.

Evidently Paul has been consistent in his preaching since Acts 13:46, for it was there he said he was to speak to the **Jews first** and when they rejected the message, then he turned to the Gentiles in the same synagogue and preached the good news of the kingdom to them.

It is interesting to see the prominence of the Jew in the epistles before Acts 28:28 and their almost lack of mention after that. The terms Jew, Israel, Israeli, and Abraham occur 61 times before this great boundary, and only 3 such occurrences after. Surely this in itself should make us sit up and take notice. It must be significant.

So in the Roman church, the Jew is first, has every advantage, except in the matter of sin. In that there is no difference between the Jewish and Gentile believers; all had sinned and come short of the glory of God. So in Romans we see the unfolding of the promise made to Abraham, that through his seed all the nations of the earth are to be blest.

We must digress long enough here to clear up any misconceptions men may have. We must note that the word **blest** is used. Nowhere does it say through Abraham will the nations of the world receive life. Salvation, not life, was of the Jews. And Gentiles received blessings only through Israel from Abraham till Acts 28:28 and in no other way. These blessings were either as crumbs from the children's table, or after Peter in the house of Cornelius, the Gentiles received blessings as described in Romans by the wild olive branch in its relation to the true olive tree. The Gentile was dependent on Israel for blessings, but not for life eternal. The people of Nineveh repented and will be resurrected.

Also we must remember that Romans was written on the other side of the frontier of Acts 28:28 and we do well to hesitate in claiming any of it for ourselves as truth for today. It does not fit in with our dispensational setting at all. Many doctrines in it may be repeated in the prison epistles. If so, then they are valid for today. But it is best to go to the prison epistles to find them and apply them. I wish to stress this, for some tradition speaks of Roman stones for the Ephesian temple. The Ephesian temple is a new creation and contains no used materials. The old temple had to be completely demolished and the ground cleared before a new one could be created and which is still growing.

**To the Jew first** in Rom. 2:9, 10 does not refer to the historical or chronological order. It was the fact that the Jew had a priority in both blessing and in judgment. This gives a good picture of the character of the dispensation of that time.

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### **THE COVENANT AND THE MYSTERY #3**

(From Vol. 22, #5, p. 257)

In the prophecies of Hosea and others, there is a hint of the present age, a two days in the which Israel will be out of God's plan and purpose. But these prophecies do not tell of Israel being blest in these days. The salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, no longer of the Jews.

But in the millennial times, there is a great deal to be said of the advantages of the Jews. They were first in Acts, both in blessing and in judgment. Again they will have a prior position, but even to a greater extent than at any time before.

If you read Isa. 60 and 61 you will discover some glorious things in store for God's people. Then they will assume a position among the nations wherein they will be head, and not the tail. The nations will speak of them as being the ministers of their God. The nations, these Gentiles, will stand and feed the flocks of Israel, and also be their plowmen (and that willingly). The sons of strangers will build up the walls of the cities of the land. Even Gentile kings shall minister to the Jews. And the law of God in that day will be that those nations who refuse to minister to Israel shall perish.

In times past Israel in some instances dwelt in Jerusalem, holding to their dispensational position, being a channel of blessing to these Gentiles who came to Jerusalem to worship, and so were a people. So in the millennial kingdom, Israel will be a people dwelling in their city, and being a blessing to the nations of the earth as was promised to Abraham.

One fact that must be noted is that when Paul wrote to the Romans, the Jew was first dispensationally. But as to sin, there was no difference between Jewish and Gentile believers. All had sinned and come short of the glory of God. We further learn this was recognized and so God was able then to deal with both in grace as far as the sin question was concerned. We must not overlook this fact. God was not the God of the Jew only, but of every man who bore the image of God. Eternal life has always been available to all men. But salvation or dispensational privileges belong to those who are chosen. We find in Ephesians that this same principle works today in relation to the world and the church of the dispensation of the mystery. We must be careful here.

Churches today who believe the church began some time before Acts 28:28 are strangely silent about the dispensational argument in Rom. 9, 10, 11. The Jews had been teaching that because of the fact they were children of Abraham, their dispensational position was safe. They were sure they would inherit the kingdom. But an inheritance can be forfeited (but not everlasting life). And so in Romans, the Gentiles who believed and were grafted into the olive tree were warned they could lose that position. The Jews who had been broken out of the tree had lost their position. They would not enter the kingdom. But the Gentiles were told they could be torn out of this position and the Jews grafted back in again. Remember, all this has nothing to do with everlasting life. We repeat that. Also remember that a son of Abraham might be a Gentile (Gal. 3:7).

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### THE COVENANT AND THE MYSTERY #4

(From Vol. 22, #6, p. 261)

Our main ground for this series is the epistle of Paul to the *Romans*. It has to do with the dispensation of promise. So it naturally would have to do with the covenant, the old one, and also the new one which was made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jer 31:31). No covenant was ever made with Gentiles.

The saints at Rome had to learn the promises were to and for the seed. And then the Romans are reminded in Rom. 9:8 that only the children of promise are counted for the seed. It is in Isaac the true seed were to be called. This is going to cause some difficulty for those who noted at the end of our last article that a son of Abraham might be a Gentile.

If you will notice carefully, that is exactly what Paul is trying to explain in Romans. Paul had a further revelation, a gospel which he called his gospel and also the gospel of the grace of God. This was that a Gentile who believed and met with the Jews at the synagogue, by faith could be a son of Abraham and partake of the promise made to Abraham. This Gentile no longer needed to follow the directions of the law and be circumcised. This was the burden of Paul's argument in Galatians.

Now if the dispensation of the mystery had begun before this time, as some argue, then we have some weighty problems on our hands. For in it the covenant has no place, and being a son of Abraham would have absolutely no advantage.

In Rom. 9:24 the Romans are reminded that God had called, not Jews only, but Gentiles. Keep in mind the non-Jewish believers are called Gentiles when you come to Chapter 11. And, as we have said before, the Gentiles of Romans are believers, not the heathen who had never heard the gospel. This will clear up many a difficulty in Romans.

Paul quotes freely from the OT Scriptures to show that the relationship of the Gentile believers to the promise in Romans is a matter of prophecy, not a secret hid in God from ages and generations as was the dispensation of the mystery.

So in Rom. 10:20 is a quote from Isaiah telling that some time the Lord would be found by a people who sought Him not, and would be made manifest to those who had not asked after Him. And the next verse calls Israel a disobedient and gainsaying people. They were warned in Rom. 10:9,10 to confess Jesus as Lord and believe in their hearts God had raised Him from the dead, so they might be saved from the terrible events of A.D. 70 when Titus finally came and destroyed many of them and their temple.

We now are at Chapter 11 of Romans. This chapter has been sadly treated, or mistreated, by expositors and commentators. If the church began at Pentecost or any other time before the end of Acts, then this chapter can be an unsolved enigma. And few of them mention it at all. Again we must insist that Gentiles in this chapter are believing non-Jewish people. We must see and realize that believing Gentiles during Acts and up to 28:28 were blessed with faithful Abraham. The present time in verse 5 means at that time Paul was writing, about A.D. 58, not 2,000 years later. We must keep to the facts, not indulge in fancy.

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### THE COVENANT AND THE MYSTERY #5

(From Vol. 22, #7, p. 265)

The 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans deserves a lot more space than we can give it here. But in the hope readers will carry on the study, we give a bare outline and leave it with you.

*At the time of the writing of Romans, God had not cast away His People, Israel.* The reason, a remnant believed. This is likened to the 7,000 men who had not bowed the knee to Baal in the time of Elijah. The remnant had obtained what Israel had been looking for many centuries, but did not know the day of their visitation when their Messiah came and tabernacled among them.

*This remnant was an election by the grace of God.* And we know that election is based on foreknowledge. The blindness of the major portion was foretold in the OT. It was also prophesied the fall of Israel would be a blessing to the Gentiles. Paul tells them this is now taking place at the time of his writing.

The reason for this speaking to Gentiles is explained: that it might wake up the greater part of Israel and *provoke them to jealousy.* Paul is still very zealous for his nation, Israel. So he hopes his preaching to Gentiles and grafting them into the hope and blessings of Israel might shake up Israel and awaken them so they might believe.

Verse 15 gives us a little hint of the future. He asks what will happen to the Gentiles when all Israel is saved, if their partial falling away is a blessing. This is a little glimpse into the future when the great commission of Matthew 28 goes into effect.

All these Gentile believers who have been grafted in are warned. They are to be careful they do not boast of their great privilege. For if God had broken out the natural branches, He also could break out the wild ones. *He also could graft the natural branches back in.* In fact, this very thing was in their future if prophecy had gone on according to the schedule laid down in Dan. 9. Paul expected the Lord to come in that generation, and then all Israel would have been saved (preserved). See verse 26.

Paul is preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and to the Gentiles he is telling the gospel of the grace of God. All Israel is beloved for the sake of the fathers and the promises made to them. But at the time of Paul's writing, the enmity of the bulk of Israel to the gospel turned out to be a blessing to the Gentiles. *The Gentiles obtained mercy because of the unbelief of Israel.* There is a further statement in verse 32 that is not generally understood. God has concluded all Israel under sin, both the believing remnant and those who are enemies, so He might have mercy upon all of them! Now go back to verse 30. Again it is made plain that Gentiles had obtained mercy because the Gentiles believed. Quite a puzzle.

The whole chapter goes to show that the great commission has not yet begun, but is foreshadowed. Paul is preaching a gospel to Gentiles which is similar to that which the 12 will preach in the great millennium, and all this under the covenant.

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### THE COVENANT AND THE MYSTERY #6

(From Vol. 22, #8, p. 269)

We have noted in Romans 11 that the Gentile believers are spoken of as wild olive branches that are grafted into the true olive tree, or Israel. We can better understand this picture if we go to Galatians where instead of the olive tree, we have Abraham, Gentiles finally can have a part in the promises made to Abraham. See the following:

Gal. 3:9 *blessed with faithful Abraham.*

Gal. 3:14. *that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles.*

Gal. 3:29. *If ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.*

In the next chapter, verses 24-26 we have the New Jerusalem, the Jerusalem which is above and which Abraham looked for, as a mother to those that believe, both Jew and Gentile.

So beginning at Acts 10:24 and ending at Acts 28:28, the Gentile believer could partake of the promises to Abraham and come into covenant relationship with God. Before that, the Gentile was just a dog, that could only eat crumbs that fell from Israel's table. But Paul shows in this attempt to make Israel jealous, Gentile believers can sit at the table with Israel and partake of all thereon.

But in being grafted in, the Gentiles had no equality with the natural branches in some ways. Rom. 9:3-5 shows how the Jew was superior in that respect. Dispensationally, the Jew was first. In his standing before God in Christ, the Gentile believer was equal. There was no difference. And there was another aspect in which they were equal. Both Jew and Gentile had both sinned and come short of the glory of God. We must notice these things.

We also might add there is a great deal of doctrinal truth in Romans repeated in the epistles written to us Gentiles today. But it is a waste of time to try to go through Romans, for example, and sort out these things. Those that are valid are repeated and we need not take the risk of making mistakes in sorting out the material.

Another thing we must keep in mind when reading Romans, or any other epistle of that era, is when Jewish and Gentile peoples are spoken of, usually it refers to believers. All too often people have thought that *Gentiles* in Romans always meant the Gentile world in general. That cannot be true. The whole of the Gentile world was not grafted into the olive tree; just such as believed.

We might add here that the Gentile believers were not obliged to observe any of the Jewish rituals or feasts. It was not necessary they be baptized in water or partake of the Passover. The council in Jerusalem had made a decision about these things (Acts 15:1-29). The council then made it plain there were 4 things the Gentile believers were required to do, and no more. To them was the gospel of the grace of God preached (Acts 20:24). This gospel was never preached to Israel, even though Paul was accused of it by his enemies (Acts 21:21).

According to Jer 31:31, the New Covenant was to be with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Did Gentiles partake of the new or the old?

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## THE COVENANT AND THE MYSTERY #7

(From Vol. 22, #9, p.273)

### Summary and Conclusion

It was not possible that Gentile believers could partake of the blessings of Israel, (as was the case from Acts 10 to 28) and be in the church of the dispensation of the mystery at the same time. This was made clear in Eph 2:12. That passage tells us when the Gentile believers were grafted into the olive tree and partook of Israel's blessings, nevertheless they were without Christ, or the Messiah. The reason for it was that by virtue of the fact they were Gentiles made them aliens from the commonwealth of Israel to whom pertained the covenants and the promises. At that time they could know Christ as their Saviour, but not as their Messiah.

Also at that time they had no hope. Hope is here used of a goal or something to look forward to. The hope of Israel was resurrection, King and a kingdom. Gentile believers all had the prospect of a resurrection, but certainly not at the time of Israel's resurrection, but much later. See Job 13 and compare with Rev. 20:11,12. So the Gentile believers that were grafted in just partook of Israel's hope. It was not their own by any means.

Furthermore those Gentile believers during Acts were said to be without God in the world. That was because God had given up the Gentile nations (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28) and chosen Israel as a new nation to be His people and said He would be their God. So they, like Ruth the Moabitess, could only say, *Thy God shall be my God*. God all the way through till Acts 28:28 was the God of Israel. But Gentiles could call upon Him and receive blessings. So did Nebuchadnezzar and others we might mention.

So we are forced to the conclusion that Gentile believers never have had any covenant relationship to God, nor do they now. That was Israel's sacred property and no individual or church has any right to it.

The Gentile believer today then can make no claim to any covenants of any kind. He cannot be blest by any promises made to any of the OT characters. He is left only to lean on the grace of God, and to benefit by the finished work of the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world.

The law was given to Israel because of the great transgression (the golden calf). The law was never given to Gentiles and they were never subject to it, either then or now. The council at Jerusalem realized this great truth (Acts 15), and so with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sent letters to the churches telling them the Gentiles were not obligated to keep the law in any way. Four things were enjoined upon them which would make their associations with the Jewish believers a little less obnoxious.

Any church or group of believers today who will claim **any** of the promises given to Abraham, or the covenants or even the law, are simply thieves and robbers. It is such that Paul speaks of as having departed from him, which means they departed from the truth that God by a special dispensation had entrusted to Paul. So we are obliged to conclude that the covenant and the mystery have nothing in common, they do not overlap, and neither do they have the same hope and time of resurrection.

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