

THE DIVINE PLAN OF THE AGES

STUDY V

"THE MYSTERY HID FROM AGES AND FROM GENERATIONS, BUT NOW MADE MANIFEST TO HIS SAINTS"--Col. 1:26

The Glimmering Light of the First Promise--The Promise to Abraham-- Hope Deferred--The Mystery Begins to Unravel at Pentecost--What the Mystery Is--Why So Long Kept a Mystery--Still a Mystery to the World--In Due Time to be Made Manifest to All--When the Mystery Will be Finished.

WHILE mankind was under the discipline of evil, and unable to understand its necessity, God repeatedly expressed his purpose to restore and bless them through a coming deliverer. But who that deliverer should be was a mystery for four thousand years, and it only began to be clearly revealed after the resurrection of Christ, in the beginning of the Christian or Gospel age.

Looking back to the time when life and Edenic happiness were forfeited by our first parents, we see them under the just penalty of sin filled with sorrow, and without a ray of hope, except that drawn from the obscure statement that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. Though in the light of subsequent developments this is full of significance to us, to them it was but a faint and glimmering light. Nearly two thousand years rolled by with no evidence of a fulfilment.

About two thousand years after, God called Abraham, and promised that his seed should bless all the families of the earth. This looked as though God still held to his previously expressed purpose, and was now about to fulfil it. Time sped on: the promised land of Canaan was not yet in his possession; they had yet no offspring, and Abraham and Sarah were growing old. Abraham reasoned that he must help God to fulfil his promise; so Ishmael was born. But his assistance was not needed, for in *due time* Isaac, the child of hope and promise, was born. Then it seemed that the promised

ruler and blessing of nations had come. But no: years rolled by, and seemingly God's promise had failed; for Isaac died, and his heir, Jacob, also. But the faith of a few still held firmly to the promise, and was sustained by God; for "the covenant which he made with Abraham" was assured by God's "oath unto Isaac, and confirmed to Jacob...and to Israel for an everlasting covenant." 1 Chron. 16:16,17

When at the time of Jacob's death his descendants were first called the TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL, and recognized of God as a "chosen nation" (Gen. 49:28; Deut. 26:5), the expectation that this nation as a whole, as the promised seed of Abraham, should possess Canaan, and rule and bless the world, seemed to be on the eve of realization; for already, under the favor of Egypt, they were becoming a strong nation. But hope was almost blasted and the promise almost forgotten when the Egyptians, having gained control of them, held them as slaves for a long period.

Truly God's promises were shrouded in mystery, and his ways seemed past finding out. However, in due time came Moses, a great deliverer, by whose hand God led them out of bondage, working mighty miracles on their behalf. Before entering Canaan this great deliverer died; but as the Lord's mouthpiece he declared, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me." (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22) This gave a further insight into God's

plan, showing that not only would their nation, as a whole, be associated in some way with the future work of ruling and blessing, but that one to be selected from among them would lead to victory and to the fulfilment of the promise. Then Joshua, whose name signifies deliverer, or savior, became their leader, and under him they won great victories, and actually entered the land promised in the covenant. Surely then it seemed that the true leader had come, and that the promise was about to have complete fulfilment.

But Joshua died, and they made no headway as a nation until David, and then Solomon, were given them as kings. There they reached the very zenith of their glory; but soon, instead of seeing the promise accomplished, they were shorn of their power, and became tributary to other nations. Some held fast the promise of God, however, and still looked for the great deliverer of whom Moses, Joshua, David and Solomon were only types.

About the time when Jesus was born, all men were in expectation of the Messiah, the coming king of Israel and, through Israel, of the world. But Israel's hope of the glory and honor of their coming king, inspired as it was by the types and prophecies of his greatness and power, caused them to overlook another set of types and prophecies, which pointed to a work of suffering and death, as a ransom for sinners, necessary before the blessing could come. This was prefigured in the Passover before they were delivered from Egypt, in the slaying of the animals at the giving of the law covenant (Heb. 9:11-20; 10:8-18), and in the Atonement sacrifices performed year by year continually by the priesthood. They overlooked, too, the statement of the prophets, "who testified beforehand the *sufferings* of Christ, and the glory that

should follow." (1 Peter 1:11) Hence, when Jesus came as a sacrifice, they did not recognize him; they knew not the time of their visitation. (Luke 19:44) Even his immediate followers were sorely perplexed when Jesus died; and sadly they said, "We trusted it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." (Luke 24:21) Apparently, their confidence in him had been misplaced. They failed to see that the death of their leader was a surety for the New Covenant under which the blessings were to come, a partial fulfilment of the covenant of promise. However, when they found that he had risen from the tomb, their withered hopes again began to revive (1 Peter 1:3), and when he was about to leave them, they asked concerning their long-cherished and oft-deferred hope, saying, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" That their hopes were in the main correct, though they might not know the time when they would be fulfilled, is evident from our Lord's reply: "It is not for you to know the times and seasons which the Father hath put in his own power." Acts 1:6,7

What turn has God's plan now taken? must have been the query of his disciples when Jesus had ascended; for we must remember that our Lord's teachings concerning the Kingdom were principally in parables and dark sayings. He had said to them, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 16:12,13; 14:26) So they could not understand before the Pentecostal blessing came.

Even then, it was some time before they got a clear, full understanding of the work

being done, and its relation to the original covenant. (Acts 11:9; Gal. 2:2,12,14) However, it would seem that even before they fully and clearly understood, they were used as the mouthpieces of God, and their inspired words were probably clearer and deeper expressions of truth than they themselves fully comprehended. For instance, read James' discourse in which he says: "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name [a bride]. And to this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written, 'After this [after this people from the Gentiles has been taken out] I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David [the earthly dominion] which is fallen down, and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up.'" Acts 15:14-16

James began to read in God's providence, in the sending of the Gospel through Peter to the first Gentile convert and through Paul to Gentiles in general, that during this age believing Jews and Gentiles were to be alike favored. He then looked up the prophecies and found it so written; and that after the work of this Gospel age is completed, then the promises to fleshly Israel will be fulfilled. Gradually the great mystery, so long hidden, began to be understood by a few--the saints, the special "friends" of God.

Paul declares (Col. 1:27) that this mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, now made manifest to his saints, is

"Christ in You, the Hope of Glory."

This is the great mystery of God which has been hidden from all previous ages, and is still hidden from all except a special class--the saints, or consecrated believers. But what is meant by "Christ in you?" We have

learned that Jesus was anointed with the holy Spirit (Acts 10:38), and thus we recognize him to be the Christ--the anointed--for the word *Christ* signifies *anointed*. And the Apostle John says that *the anointing* which *we* (consecrated believers) have received *abideth in us*. (1 John 2:27) Thus the saints of this Gospel age are an anointed company--anointed to be kings and priests unto God (2 Cor. 1:21; 1 Peter 2:9); and together with Jesus, their chief and Lord, they constitute Jehovah's Anointed--the Christ.

In harmony with this teaching of John, that we also are *anointed*, Paul assures us that this mystery which has been kept secret in ages past, but which is now made known to the saints, is that *the Christ* (the Anointed) is "not one member, but many," just as the human body is one, and has many members; but as all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Anointed--the Christ. (1 Cor. 12:12-28) Jesus is anointed to be the Head or Lord over the Church, which is his body (or his bride, as expressed in another figure--Eph. 5:25-30), and unitedly they constitute the *promised "Seed"*--the Great Deliverer: "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's *seed*, and *heirs* according to the promise." Gal. 3:29

The Apostle carefully guards the Church against any presumptive claims, saying of Jesus that "God hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body," "that in all things he might have *the pre-eminence*." (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18) Yet, under the figure of the human body, he beautifully and forcibly shows our intimate relationship. This same oneness Jesus also taught, saying, "I am the vine, ye are the branches." John 15:5

Our oneness with the Lord Jesus, as members of the Christ, the anointed company, is well illustrated by the figure of the pyramid.

The top-stone is a perfect pyramid of itself. Other stones may be built up under it, and, if in harmony with all the characteristic lines of the top-stone, the whole mass will be a perfect pyramid. How beautifully this illustrates our position as members of "the Seed"--"the Christ." Joined to and perfectly in harmony with our Head, we, as living stones, are perfect; separated from him, we are nothing.

Jesus, the perfect one, has been highly exalted, and now we present ourselves to him that we may be formed and shaped according to his example, and that we may be built up as a building of God. In an ordinary building there is no *chief* corner-stone; but in our building there is one chief corner-stone, the "top-stone," as it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious"--"to whom coming as unto a living stone...ye also as lively [living] stones are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up *sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 2:4-6) And very soon, we trust, the union between Jesus, the "Head," and "the Church, which is his body," will be complete.

*Sinaitic MS. omits *spiritual* before sacrifices.

And, dearly beloved, many blows and much polishing must we endure--much transforming must we undergo, and much conforming to his example, under the direction of the great Master-builder; and in order to have the ability and ideality of the builder displayed in us, we will need to see that we have no cross-grained will of our own to oppose or thwart the accomplishment

of His will in us; we must be very childlike and humble--"clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." Let us humble ourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt us in due time (1 Peter 5:5,6), as he has exalted our Head and Forerunner. Phil. 2:8,9

This is indeed a wonderful message, and, as we come to the Word of God to inquire concerning our great high calling, we find the prophets all eloquent in proclaiming the grace [favor or blessing] that is come unto us (1 Peter 1:10); while types, and parables, and hitherto dark sayings, now become luminous, shedding their light on the "narrow way" in which the anointed [Christ] company is called to run for the prize now disclosed to view. This was truly a mystery never before thought of--that God intends to raise up not only a deliverer, but a deliverer composed of many members. This is the "*high calling*" to which the consecrated believers of the Gospel age are privileged to attain. Jesus did not attempt to unfold it to the disciples while natural men, but waited until at Pentecost they were anointed--begotten to the new nature. From Paul's explanation we know that none but "new creatures" can now appreciate or understand this high calling. He says: "We speak the wisdom of God in a *mystery*, even the hidden wisdom [plan] which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes [chief ones] of this world knew; ...as it is written, 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him'; but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." 1 Cor. 2:6-14

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul opens up the entire mystery, and shows how the Abrahamic covenant is to be fulfilled. He

shows that the Law given to Israel did not interfere with the original covenant (Gal. 3:15-18), and that the seed of Abraham which is to bless all nations is Christ. (Verse 16) Then, carrying out the idea already alluded to, that the Christ includes all anointed of the Spirit, he says: "For as many of you as have been baptized *into Christ* have put on Christ;...and if ye be Christ's then are YE [together with Jesus] *Abraham's seed*, and heirs, according to the promise" made to Abraham. (Verses 27,29) Following up the same line of reasoning, he shows (Gal. 4) that Abraham was a type of Jehovah, Sarah a type of the covenant or promise, and Isaac a type of Christ (head and body); and then adds, "We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." (Verse 28) Thus the plan of God was hidden in types until the Gospel age began the development of the Christ.

There has existed a necessity for keeping this mystery hidden, else it would not have been so kept. It was necessary, because to have revealed the plan in full to mankind would have been to frustrate it. Had men known, they would not have crucified either the Lord of glory or the Church which is his body. (1 Cor. 2:8) Not only would the death of Christ, as the price of man's redemption, have been interfered with, had not the plan been kept a mystery from the world, but the trial of the faith of the Church, as sharers in the sufferings of Christ, would thereby have been prevented also; for "The world knoweth us not [as his joint-heirs] because [for the same reason that] it knew him not." 1 John 3:1

Not only is the plan of God, and the Christ which is the very embodiment of that plan, a great mystery to the world, but the peculiar course in which this little flock is called to walk marks its members as "peculiar people." It was a mystery to the

world that a person of so much ability as Jesus of Nazareth should spend his time and talent as he did, whereas, if he had turned his attention to politics, law, merchandise or popular religion, he might have become great and respected. In the opinion of men he foolishly wasted his life, and they said, "He hath a devil and is mad." His life and teachings were mysteries to them. They could not understand him.

The apostles and their companions were likewise mysteries in the world, in leaving their business prospects, etc., to preach forgiveness of sins through the death of the despised and crucified Jesus. Paul forsook a high station and social influence to labor with his hands, and to preach Christ, and the invisible crown for all believers who should walk in his footsteps. This was so mysterious that some said, "Paul, thou art beside thyself: much learning doth make thee mad." And all who so follow in the Master's footsteps are, like Paul, counted fools for Christ's sake.

But God's plan will not always be shrouded in mystery: the dawn of the Millennial Day brings the fuller light of God to men, and "the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth." The Sun of Righteousness, which shall arise with healing in his wings, dispelling the darkness of ignorance, is the Christ in Millennial glory--not the Head alone, but also the members of his body; for it is written: If we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear *with him in glory*"; and "Then shall the righteous shine forth *as the sun* in the kingdom of their Father." Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:11,12; Col. 3:4; Matt. 13:43

Now, to all except those begotten to a new mind, by receiving "the mind of

Christ," the promises which we believe, and the hopes which we cherish, seem visionary, and too improbable to be received or acted upon. In the age to come, when God shall "pour out his spirit upon all flesh," as during the present age he pours it upon his "servants and handmaids," then indeed all will understand and appreciate the promises now being grasped by the "little flock"; and they will rejoice in the obedience and exaltation of the Church, saying, "Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give honor to God, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." (Rev. 19:7) They will rejoice in the glorification of the Church, through which blessings will then be flowing to them; and while they will realize that the "exceeding great and precious promises" inherited by the Anointed (head and body) are not for them, but are fulfilled upon us, they will be blessed by the lesson illustrated in the Church; and while they run for the blessings *then held out to them*, they will profit by the example of the Church, and glorify God on her behalf. But this knowledge will not bring covetousness; for under the new order of things their calling to perfect human nature will fully satisfy them, and will seem more desirable to them than a change of nature.

Then the "mystery" will have ended; for the world will have come to see that it was the spirit of God in Christ, and the spirit of Christ in us--God manifested in the flesh--which they had hitherto misunderstood. Then they will see that we were not mad, nor fools; but that we chose the better part when we ran for the riches, honors and crown, unseen by them, but eternal.

In point of time, the mystery of God will be finished during the period of the sounding of the seventh [symbolic] trumpet. (Rev. 10:7) This applies to the mystery in both senses in which it is used: the mystery

or secret features of God's *plan* will then be made known and will be clearly seen; and also the "mystery of God," the Church, the embodiment of that plan. Both will then be finished. The secret, hidden plan will have sought out the full, complete number of the members of the body of Christ, and hence it, the BODY OF CHRIST, will be finished. The plan will cease to be a mystery, because there will be no further object in perpetuating its secrecy. The greatness of the mystery, so long kept secret, and hidden in promises, types and figures, and the wonderful grace bestowed on those called to fellowship in this mystery (Eph. 3:9), suggest to us that the work to follow its completion, for which for six thousand years Jehovah has kept mankind in expectation and hope, must be an immense work, a grand work, worthy of such great preparations. What may we not expect in blessings upon the world, when the veil of mystery is withdrawn and the showers of blessing descend! It is this for which the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now, *waiting* for the completion of this mystery--for the manifestation of the Sons of God, the promised "Seed," in whom they shall all be blessed. Rom. 8:19,21,22

A Lord's Day Offering

"I offer Thee:

Every heart's throb, they are Thine;
 Every human tie of mine;
 Every joy and every pain;
 Every act of mind or brain--
 My blessed God!
 Every hope and every fear;
 Every smile and every tear;
 Every song and hymn,
 'Laudamus Te.'

"Take them all, my blessed Lord,
 Bind them with thy secret cord;

Glorify thyself in me,
Adored One!
Multiply them by thy Word;

Strengthen, bless, increase, my Lord
Of perfect love!
Thou First and Last!"