

# Applying the Touchstone and Lodestar of *Scripture* To The Morassy Foundation and Principles of *Preterism*

## Chapter 4

### The "Mystery" of Christ and the Church

#### Preterism's Misunderstanding of Church Truth

### The "Mystery" of Christ and the Church

Taking to heart the nature of "mystery" revelation in the NT in regard to the heavenly Church (bowing to God's Word in what it declares in this regard) establishes beyond doubt the literal, plain, normal interpretation of OT prophecy in regard to earthly Israel, the nations and the future earthly kingdom.

"As the church was part of 'the mystery,' which is expressly declared to be hid from ages and generations and hid in God [***not hid within OT prophecy and promises***], it is never as such the subject-matter of the [OT] prophets."—William Kelly (*Isaiah*)

The Church being a "mystery" means that there was no revelation of it in the OT. There was utter "silence" concerning it in OT times. The heavenly Body and Bride of Christ was hidden, *not within OT prophecies and promises*, but *in God*, during OT times. As such, OT promises and prophecies regarding, e.g., the future of Israel and the earthly kingdom, **CANNOT** refer to, signify, or be fulfilled in the Church. If one claims that OT prophecies and promises actually do somehow speak of the Church, then such a one is contradicting the NT, denying that the Church was a "mystery," kept secret and silent in OT times.

Preterists, and other anti-dispensationalists, seem to imagine that this concept of a NT "mystery" conveys the notion that OT prophecies and promises *did* speak of the Church, *but* they did so in a "mystical," *obscure* sense, and that it took the NT to show or shed light on that fact. That is, these anti-dispensational men are really saying that the Church *was revealed* to some extent in OT times, but we just didn't know it till the NT arrived to tell us otherwise. But a "mystery," according to NT usage, means something that was kept completely unrevealed, totally silent and hidden in God during OT times. Thus OT prophecies and promises regarding Israel and the kingdom **CANNOT** refer to the Church.

Let us look a little more closely at four key passages on this subject.

"Now to him that is able to establish you, according to my glad tidings and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to ***the revelation of the mystery, as to which silence has been kept in the times of the ages, but which has now been made manifest [thus excluding OT prophecies and promises!]***, and by prophetic scriptures [of the NT], according to commandment of the eternal God, made known for obedience of faith to all the nations—the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever. Amen." (Rom. 16:25-27)

"For this reason I Paul, prisoner of the Christ Jesus for you nations, (if indeed ye have heard of the administration of the grace of God which has been given to me towards you, that ***by revelation the mystery has been made known to me***, (according as I have written before briefly, by which, in reading it, ye can understand my intelligence in the mystery of the Christ,) ***which in other generations has not been made known to the sons of men [thus***

**excluding OT prophecies and promises], as it has now been revealed** to his holy apostles and prophets in the power of the Spirit, **that** they who are of the nations should be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings; of which I am become minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me, according to the working of his power. To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given, to announce among the nations the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ, and to enlighten all with the knowledge of what is **the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God**, who has created all things, in order **that now** to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies **might be made known through the assembly** the all-various wisdom of God, according to the purpose of the ages, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access in confidence by the faith of him." (Eph. 3:1-12)

"Now, I rejoice in sufferings for you, and I fill up that which is behind of the tribulations of Christ in my flesh, **for his body, which is the church**; of which I became minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given me towards you to complete the word of God, **the mystery [of His Body, which is the Church,' verse 24] which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been made manifest** to his saints [**thus excluding OT prophecies and promises**]; to whom God would make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you the hope of glory." (Col. 1:24-27)

"But we speak God's wisdom **in a mystery**, the **hidden [wisdom] which God pre-determined before the ages** for our glory; **which none of the rulers of the age knew . . . but**, according as it is written, **Things which eye saw not and ear heard not, and into man's heart entered not, all which God prepared** for those that love him, **but God revealed to us by his Spirit**; for the Spirit searcheth all things, even the depths of God." (1 Cor. 2:6-10)

"The place to begin is to have *God's point* to how to understand; and He has done so in several Scriptures that tell us that silence was kept in the OT regarding the hidden mystery of Christ and the church. This tells us that the spiritualization of the OT prophets by those who hold to covenant theology flies in the face of what God has expressly stated. Thus, being so guided, and *submitting* thereto, we are on our proper ground of *faith* -- which comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. This is "*the obedience of faith*" (Rom. 16:25, 26), regarding the mystery (not the gospel -- cp. Rom. 1:1-5), which we will consider below. We have the Scriptures that are written to Christians, as such, and turn to them **first** for guidance. The **first** thing to be settled is not 'literal' versus 'spiritual' interpretation. Listen to [Col. 1:24-26] . . . The great secret that had been 'hidden throughout the ages in God' (Eph. 3:9), which completes the Word of God [Col. 1:25], ought surely to be before our hearts, providing light and guidance in our understanding of the purpose of God for His own glory in Christ, and how to rightly understand what He formerly did. **How this bears on the subject of the coming kingdom predicted in the OT is this: since the prophets did not speak of the mystery of Christ and the Church, the mystery of Christ and the church are not the fulfilment of those prophecies.** This precludes the spiritual alchemy that transmutes those prophecies into prophecies concerning Christ and the church. Thus, the OT prophecies which speak of Israel's future glory are to be understood just as a Jew at that time could only have understood them -- literally (with due allowance for figures of speech and symbols), and there is no fulfillment of the prophesied kingdom during the present period. In order to have these prophecies fulfilled now, it is necessary in covenant theology to 'spiritualize' the statements of the prophets so that no literal kingdom is meant. Among other things, appeal is made to the fact that the prophets do use obvious figures of speech and symbols and so it is claimed that when they prophesied about Jerusalem, Israel and Judah, the new covenant, etc., the church was meant. This involves two things: the mystery of Christ and the church is defined to be something that it really is not, so as to have the OT prophets speak of it; and, contradict the Word when it says silence was kept concerning the mystery. Any sensible literalist allows, of course, for the use of figures of speech and symbols. But, he rightly says, Judah, Jerusalem and Israel mean just that and not the church. Accordingly, the new covenant (Jer. 31; Heb. 8) is for the future nation of Israel during the millennium. Let us now look at those Scriptures which show that the OT prophets did not speak about the church. **It is claimed by spiritualizers of the OT prophets that the OT quotations found in Acts and the Epistles show that the prophets spoke of the church. Suffice it to say here that while those texts will be fulfilled in the coming 1000 year reign of Christ, they are cited by the NT writers as having some bearing or application in principle meanwhile, and designate neither a complete nor partial fulfillment of them, either in the church, or to Israel before the Millennium.**"

"We are going to look at three Scriptures concerning the mystery of Christ and the church. Received into the soul, via the conscience, which is the inlet of truth, we will see that the OT prophets did not speak about the church. These three Scriptures are: [Rom. 16:25—**silence kept in the times of the ages**; Col. 1:26—**hidden from ages and generations**; Eph. 3:9—**hidden throughout the ages in God**.] Something can be learned by weighing the various emphases [in each passage]."

"Once I was asked to visit an Arminian and we came to Heb. 6:1-6, where it is said that if a person falls away it is **'impossible'** to renew him again unto repentance. That is not good for the lost-again saved-again

notion. But he had a triumphant reply. He said that 'impossible' meant 'almost impossible.' Well, that brought the discussion to an end. That was the sign of a determined agenda, not of subjection to the Word of God. It is like when pointing out that 'silence has been kept,' retorting that 'silence has been almost kept.'"

"The opposition amounts to this: that the mystery was *almost* secret, that it was *partially* hidden. . . . There is an agenda -- and that agenda is to find the church in the OT; to find that the prophets did speak of the mystery; to make the church be the spiritual Israel. {During the millennial reign of Christ, the new Israel under the new covenant, will have the law written in their hearts (Heb. 8). They shall all be saved (Rom. 11:26). They shall all be righteous (Isa. 60:21). Thus, the new Israel under the new covenant will be the spiritual Israel, as well as the head of the nations.} It is a fact that different opposers of this silence use different explanations, but the agenda is that the mystery was not unknown in the OT. If we will receive into our souls, through our consciences . . . that 'silence' in Rom. 16:25 means just that, we will have light from God instead of the mist of a human agenda. The mystery is 'made known for obedience of faith' (Rom. 16:26). When God says that silence was kept, the obedience of faith believes that."

"To repeat, from our vantage point of having the completed Scriptures, the first thing to be settled is not 'literal' versus 'spiritual' interpretation. What needs to be done first is to bow within one's soul to the force of Rom. 16:25, 26 and several other Scriptures. . . . opposers of dispensational truth undermine the word "silence," as they must necessarily do, since their object is to find references in the OT to the mystery of Christ and the church, concerning which silence was kept in the times of the ages. . . . Notice from this quotation that not only was it a secret and concealed, but concealed for long ages. . . . It is clear that the OT spoke of future salvation for the Gentiles. {There will be saved Gentiles in the Millennium.} That is not the mystery. The OT had witnessed to the manifestation of the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:21) and many other things concerning Christ (Luke 24:44-46). These things are not the mystery. When anti-dispensationalists say that these things are the mystery, I ask: are they doing even the slightest justice to the statement, 'as to which silence has been kept in [the] times of the ages'? Why not forthrightly state, 'No, silence was not kept. I can find the mystery in many places in the OT -- it is easy to find predictions of salvation for the Gentiles'? Is not this what the erroneous notion that the mystery is salvation for the Gentiles . . . really amounts to?"

"Now, not only does the fact that silence was kept concerning the mystery tell us that the predicted salvation for Gentiles is not the mystery, but Rom. 16:25 makes an instructive distinction. 'Now to him that is able to establish you, according to': 'my glad tidings **and** the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to [the] revelation of [the] mystery.' Clearly, there are two things here, not one. We do not read, 'according to my glad tidings, the revelation of the mystery.' But I suggest that this is the way, in effect, that anti-dispensationalists take the passage. The loss in not seeing this is great. Look at the words, '*Now to him that is able to **establish** you.*' This verse tells us that **two** things are necessary for establishment. The glad tidings only does part of this. A right apprehension of the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery (and, of course, a corresponding Christian walk in this truth -- not mere profession about it), is necessary for establishment. Oh, you object, just because I do not accept 'dispensationalism' with its distinction between Israel and the church, etc., I am not established? Well, I did not say it, the text says it. It is the same concerning the gospel. What is needed is a right apprehension of the glad tidings concerning 'that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he was raised the third day, according to the scriptures,' etc. (1 Cor. 15:3-4) (and of course, a corresponding Christian walk in this truth -- not mere profession about it -- is necessary for establishment). Oh, you object, 'just because I do not accept your dispensational distinction between the way of approach to God in Israel, and what you say about approach to God *now*, I am not established? Well, I think we still need priests today who can offer a sacrifice.' "

"W. Kelly wrote: 'We must, however, guard against the notion that 'the mystery' or secret means the gospel. The gospel in itself does not and never can mean a mystery. It was that which in its foundations always was before the mind of God's people in the form of promise, or of a revelation of grace not yet accomplished. But nowhere in Scripture is the gospel called a mystery. It may be connected with the mystery, but it is not itself a mystery. It was no mystery that a Savior was to be given; it was the very first revelation of grace after man became a sinner. The Seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent's head. A mystery is something that was not revealed of old, and which could not be known otherwise. Again, you have in the prophets a full declaration that the righteousness of God was near to come; the plainest possible statement that God was going to show Himself a Savior-God. So again you have His making an end of sins and bringing in reconciliation and everlasting righteousness. All these things were in no sense the mystery. The mystery means that which was kept secret, not that which could not be understood, which is a human notion of mystery; but an unrevealed secret, -- a secret not yet divulged in the OT but brought out fully in the New. What, then, is this mystery? It is, first, that Christ, instead of taking the kingdom, predicted by the prophets, should completely disappear from the scene of this world, and that God should set Him up in heaven at His own right hand as the Head of all glory, heavenly and earthly, and that He should give the

whole universe into the hands of Christ to administer the kingdom and maintain the glory of God the Father in it. This is the first and most essential part of the mystery, the second, or Church's part, being but the consequence of it. Christ's universal headship is not the theme spoken of in the OT. You have Him as Son of David, Son of man, Son of God, the King; but nowhere is the whole universe of God (but rather the kingdom under the whole heavens) put under Him. In this headship over all things, Christ will share all with His bride. Christ will have His Church the partner of His own unlimited dominion, when that day of glory dawns upon the world. Hence, then, as we know, the mystery consists of two great parts, which we have summed up in Eph. 5:32: 'This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church.' Thus the mystery means neither Christ nor the Church alone, but Christ and the Church united in heavenly blessedness and dominion over everything that God has made. Hence, as we saw from {Eph.} chapter 1, when He was raised from the dead, God set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, 'and put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church.' It is not said, 'over the church,' which would overthrow, not teach, the mystery. He will be over Israel and over the Gentiles, but nowhere is He said to reign over the Church. The Church is His body. I admit it is a figure, but a figure that conveys an intense degree of intimacy, full of the richest comfort and the most exalted hope. The saints who are now being called are to share all things along with Christ in that day of glory. Hence it becomes of the greatest interest to know what the nature of the Church is. When did its calling begin, and what is the character of that calling, what the responsibilities that flow from it?"

"If Rom. 16:25, 26 were simply received into the soul, one would understand that the OT does not speak of the mystery of Christ and the Church, which is His body. It expressly states that 'silence has been kept in [the] times of the ages.' Why not bow in heart to the fact? But that would mean acknowledging that the prophets did not prophesy concerning the church. *Types* are not prophecies; nor is a type the uttering of something about the church, nor the uttering of anything else. 'Silence' is the word. The truth of Christ and the Church 'has now been made manifest, and by prophetic scriptures.' These prophetic Scriptures are New Testament writings, and in particular, Paul's writings. These things are now made manifest by this instrumentality 'according to the commandment of the eternal God.' All has unfolded as it has because He is sovereign and has commanded it to be thus."

"And what are we to do? Obey. '... made known for obedience of faith to all the nations.' What was made known? The mystery. Rom. 1:5 speaks of 'obedience of faith among all the nations.' I believe all Christians, sealed with the Spirit (Eph. 1:13), have participated in what Rom. 1:1-5 refers to concerning 'obedience of faith.' But at the end of Romans we find something further made known for the 'obedience of faith.' Here, the mystery is mentioned. In Rom. 1 it is a matter of our calling: in Rom. 16:25, 26 it is a matter of the mystery. There are many who have 'obedience of faith' regarding their calling, but not 'obedience of faith' regarding the mystery. I hardly think there is 'obedience of faith' regarding the mystery when Scripture says *silence* was kept concerning it and a Christian labors to prove that silence was not kept in the OT concerning it. The force of Rom. 16:25, 26 is resisted because to receive what it expressly states means that some highly developed theological systems will collapse.

"In direct opposition to the express statements of Scripture, covenant theology says that the mystery can be found in the OT prophets but not to the degree 'as it has now been revealed' (Eph. 3:5). That is the use made of the word *as*. So instead of understanding *as* in the light of Rom. 16:25, 26, theology attempts to force Rom. 16:25, 26 into conformity with this false construction put upon *as*, and in effect turning the word 'silence was kept' (Rom. 16:25, 26) into 'talk was made.' Eph. 3:5 indicates, not a comparison, but a fact, a contrast [i.e., '*for or but it has now been revealed*']."

"The fact that Scripture declares when, and from whom, the mystery was hidden is consistent with Rom. 16:25, 26, in affirming silence in OT ages. Col. 1:26 speaks of it also: 'the mystery [of His Body, which is the Church,' verse 24] which [has been] hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been made manifest to his saints.' This means that the mystery was hidden both from past time-periods (ages) and from persons (generations). I suggest, therefore, that 'obedience of faith' in respect of the mystery will acknowledge that these Scriptures declare that the OT was silent about it. Thus the issue of 'literal' versus 'spiritual' interpretation of the OT prophets to see if they spoke about the church or not is settled by the *express* statements of Scripture itself. (Of course, the use of figures of speech and symbols is a subject of inquiry, but in no way affects the issue.) **What this means is that the OT prophets really meant Judah, Israel and Jerusalem (not the Church), and thus they have to be understood that there will be a future for national Israel. Also, the Church is not the continuator of Israel, nor the spiritual Israel. And in that day of Israel's glory, when she is purged of every rebel (Ezek. 20) and all Israel shall be saved (Rom. 11:26), Israel will not be part of the Church, the body of Christ.**"

"We have seen that silence was kept in the times of the ages, that it was hidden from those ages and the peoples. *Where*, then, was it hidden? We should have thought that it was not hidden in the OT without even God telling us so. But He *has* told us where it was hidden. . . . Here [in Eph. 3:8-9] we learn that the mystery was 'hidden throughout the ages *in God*.' It was not hidden in the OT. During the OT ages it was hidden in

God. *Types* have nothing to do, really, with the issue. Moreover, there are no types of a Head in heaven united to a body on earth. Types are history, incidents, or persons, not prophecy or revelation. The issue is that the OT prophets did not speak of the mystery of Christ and the church. There was '*silence*' about it; it was hidden from ages and from generations; it was *hidden in God*, not in the OT, not in the prophetic utterances. How is God to say it, if this does not mean what these texts are stating? Moreover, it is written in such a manner as to call for '*the obedience of faith*.' "**R.A. Huebner (from his bi-monthly publication, "Thy Precepts," Sept/Oct 2004, Vol. 19, #5 (<http://www.presenttruthpublishers.com>)). See also Volume 1 of his *Elements of Dispensational Truth*).**

James M Ventilato  
December 28, 2004  
Updated: July 4, 2013