

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XLIV : DIGRESSION #2 - PAUL AS MINISTER OF THE MYSTERY TO THE GENTILES (3:1-13)

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: how that by revelation he 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) 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; that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 KJV)

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles — Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 NIV)

For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you the nations, if, indeed, ye did hear of the dispensation of the grace of God that was given to me in regard to you, that by revelation He made known to me the secret, according as I wrote before in few [words] — in regard to which ye are able, reading [it], to understand my knowledge in the secret of the Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit — that the nations be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in the Christ, through the good news, of which I became a ministrant, according to the gift of the grace of God that was given to me, according to the working of His power; to me — the less than the least of all the saints — was given this grace, among the nations to proclaim good news — the untraceable riches of the Christ, and to cause all to see what [is] the fellowship of the secret that hath been hid from the ages in God, who the all things did create by Jesus Christ, that there might be made known now to the principalities and the authorities in the heavenly [places], through the assembly, the manifold wisdom of God, according to a purpose of the ages, which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have the freedom and the access in confidence through the faith of him, wherefore, I ask [you] not to faint in my tribulations for you, which is your glory. (Eph 3:1-13 Young's Literal Translation)

Paul as Minister of the Mystery to the Gentiles (3:1-13)

The essence of what Paul is saying is as follows:

For this cause, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you, the Gentiles —

*if, indeed, ye did hear of **the responsibility of managing the GRACE of God which was given to me, namely, that He made known the mystery that the Gentiles should be***

joint – heirs

and joint – body

and joint – partakers

of His promise in Jesus the Messiah through the gospel;

this **GRACE** was given to me

- **to preach** the unsearchable riches of the Christ among the Gentiles
- **and to enlighten** all as to what is the plan of the mystery

in order that [hina] the untraceable wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and to the authorities in the heavenlies through the ecclesia.

Therefore I ask you not to lose heart in my tribulations on behalf of you which is your glory.

v 4 — ye may understand — νοῦσαι [noēsai] “‘Understand’ (noēsai) is to receive into the mind (nous) or perceive (RV). An element of intellectual discrimination is implied.” [Wood, Ephesians on CD] Note our word is formed from the word meaning ‘mind.’ “[This word has] a basic meaning *direct one’s mind to a subject*; (1) of rational reflection or thought: *perceive, understand, comprehend* (MT 15.17); (2) as perceiving through receiving sensory data: *notice, think carefully about, recognize, consider* (MT 24.15); (3) as mental conception: *imagine, conceive* (EP 3.20)” [Friberg Lexicon] “The verb ‘noeō’ means ‘to direct one’s mind to.’ At first it is used in the broad sense ‘to perceive,’ but later it means only ‘to perceive mentally’ and then ‘to think, to understand, to intend,’ and ‘to know’ as a function of the mind. In the LXX the organ of ‘noein’ is often the heart, but the sphere of ‘noein’ is always mental. **In the NT the verb has such senses as ‘to note, to grasp, to recognize, to understand,’ and ‘to imagine.’ Jn. 12:40 takes the biblical view that the heart is the center of ‘noein.’ Knowledge has religious and moral significance. Rom. 1:20 states that God’s power and majesty may be apprehended in his works. From visible things we can and should work back (in an intellectual process) to the invisible reality of the Creator. We are thus responsible when we fail to do so. Heb. 11:3 argues that by faith we do in fact perceive that the universe is ordered by God’s word. To acknowledge that God’s creative will is the basis of all reality is to think in terms of faith. Faith sees that the invisible is the true reality, but this reality is the reality of salvation. Hence knowledge of God as Creator is rooted in the knowledge of God as Savior.**” [TDNT] “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20) So Paul teaches that all people everywhere knows two things: (1) there is a God and (2) He is a powerful God. While that is not enough to bring anyone to salvation, it is enough to show there are no such things as atheists.

my knowledge — τὴν σύνεσίν μου [tēn sunesin mou] **literally ‘union, joining, as of two rivers;’ therefore, ‘comprehension, understanding, insight.’** “The noun σύνεσις [sunesis, ‘understanding’], which is applied sometimes to the understanding *mind* (Mark xiii. 33), occurs repeatedly in the NT in the sense of mental *apprehension* (Luke ii. 47; I Cor. i. 19; Col. i. 9, ii. 2; 2 Tim. ii. 7). It is defined as *‘insight depending on judgment and inference’*” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 304] Quoting loosely from the Theological Dictionary of the NT, abridged:

“The noun form means ‘union, confluence,’ then ‘comprehension, understanding, discernment,’ and finally ‘self-awareness.’ In its verb form it means ‘to bring together, to come to agreement, to perceive, to understand.’ As an adjective it means ‘understanding, understandable,’ and in its negative, ‘not understanding.’ The word has a moral aspect involved. The LXX makes much use of the group, especially in Wisdom writings. The use is similar to that found in secular Greek except ‘understanding’ is native only to God and hence is a gift for which one must pray (1 Kings. 3:9; Ps. 119:34). Practical judgment rather than theoretical understanding is the main concern. Since understanding God’s judgments is a condition of salvation, the law (Word of God) is an essential theme. The Spirit has an important role in imparting knowledge, as does the teacher of righteousness.” [TDNT]

Paul prayed for this ‘understanding’ to be given by the Lord:

“Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding [σύνεσις, sunesin] in all things.” (2 Tim 2:7)

Paul also prayed for all believers to be filled with this ‘understanding’:

“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” [συνέσει, sunesei] (Col 1:9)

Jesus in His incarnation had this ‘understanding’ as displayed in the temple when He was twelve:

“And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding [συνέσει, sunesei] and answers.” (Luke 2:47)

The ‘understanding’ not from the Lord but of the world will be destroyed by God:

“For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding [σύνεσις, sunesin] of the prudent [συνετόν, sunetōn].” (1 Cor 1:19)

WE EITHER HAVE ‘INSIGHT’ OR WE ARE ‘FOOLISH’ — “Sunesis (*insight*) literally means to bring together and metaphorically refers to comprehension and understanding, mentally bringing knowledge together in order to grasp its full meaning and significance. Spiritual insight must always precede practical application, because what is not properly understood cannot be properly applied. The opposite of spiritual insight is ‘foolishness’ (asunetos, Rom. 1:21), lack of spiritual discernment. As is made clear from the first part of that verse, lack of discernment existed even though the necessary spiritual facts were known — ‘For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculation.’” [MacArthur, 90]

“because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish [ἄσύνετος, asunetos] hearts were darkened.” (Rom 1:21 NKJV)

“because, having known God they did not glorify Him as God, nor gave thanks, but were made vain in their reasonings, and their unintelligent [ἄσύνετος, asunetos] heart was darkened” (Rom 1:21 YLT)

This agrees with the book of Proverbs where the ‘fool’ is not referring to one’s intellectual abilities but rather their moral condition.

NO ROOM FOR BOASTING — *“It should be noted that the personal pronoun does not signify egotism on Paul’s part. He makes it clear in verse 3 that it was made known to him by revelation and in verse 5 that it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit.” [Hoehner, 436f] “The term σύνεσις (synesis, ‘insight’) refers to understanding not that Paul himself has ingeniously developed, but that has been given to him by God.... Both δοθείσης (dotheisēs, given, v. 2) and ἐγνώρισεν (egnōristhē, made known, v. 3) are divine passives. The source of his insight, then, is God.” [Thielman, 196] “Since the letter contained no previous reference, apart from v. 3, to a special revelation to Paul it is appropriate here to speak of his insight (σύνεσις, sunesis) in respect of what he has already written. [My] is not intended to suggest a contrast between Paul and someone else and it does not imply an unworthy boasting on his part, which might be the case if the insight were purely human.... [Insight] is probably drawn from the Greek OT where, particularly in Daniel (1.4, 17; 9.13, 23; 10.1, 11) it is explicitly used of the understanding of dreams and visions and implicitly associated with revelations. Since the context here is one of revelation it should not be taken as referring to human insight but to an understanding given by God into his mystery. Christian insight is of course never simple human insight for it takes place in a mind responsive to God and enlightened by his Spirit. σύνεσις (sunesis, ‘insight’) thus continues the claim of v. 3. The revelation Paul received has worked itself into his mind and become a part of him; ‘insight’ is a suitable word to describe this process; in 2.11-22 it was expressed, not in the terms of a special revelation, but of what was believed in the church. It should also be noted, and this is important if Paul himself is the author, that the appeal is not to Paul as person or apostle but to divine revelation; there is no self-glorification on Paul’s part.” [Best, 303f] This coincides with Paul’s comments elsewhere:*

“For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor 4:7)

Paul knew all we are and all we have comes from the Lord. James says the same thing:

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” (James 1:17)

This provides a paradox in the mind of some and a potential trap to sin for others: we must work, study, pray, cry, and give the tasks of our lives everything we have, yet at the end of the day we all must confess all the glory belongs to the Lord. For example, in Deut 8:6-20 Moses is warning the children of Israel about having the wrong mind-set about the things the Lord will give them as they entered the Promised Land. As Moses described the land of plenty the Lord was to give, here was the warning:

“Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest — when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them ... then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’” (Deut 8:11,12,17)

I can imagine after the land was settled some said, *“What do you mean, ‘land that You gave us’?! My husband died fighting in the wars to obtain the land. My son was also killed. There was loneliness and fear as they went to war, leaving their family behind, never knowing if they would return or not. We WORKED for this land!” But therein is the paradox / trap: we are responsible to do our best and do our duty, but whatever good comes can only come through the mercies and grace of our Lord!*

There are many modern-day examples in each of our lives:

- those with musical abilities work and sweat and practice to get good with their instruments
- those who sing must also sacrifice and work with their voices to improve their singing skills
- anyone raising children knows the multitude of thankless sacrifices made for our children
- any teacher knows real study is hard work, any pastor knows the ministry is difficult and full of problems and heartaches, any missionary knows the sacrifices made to reach those who have never heard

Yet at the end of it all, no true Christian would dare to stand and say the good results were based upon human efforts. No, anything good that comes from all our sacrifices and hard work must be attributed to the blessings and graciousness of our Lord. To Him alone is the glory for the good that comes!

WE ARE TO PASS ON TO OTHERS WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN US — Paul himself is presented as the mediator of spiritual insight. *“The insight for others with which the apostle is credited is insight into the mystery of Christ.” [Lincoln, 176] “Every sermon reveals the preacher’s grasp of ‘the mystery of Christ.’ If he has no insight into Christ, he has no call to preach.” [Robertson, Word Pictures] That is the proper sequence: God showed the apostles and prophets of the NT era who in turn recorded these revealed truths, which was then passed on to others. God uses people to pass on His truths to the*

next generation. God could just use the Word of God with an individual in seclusion if He so desires but that is not the normal order of things. “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim 2:2)

in the mystery of Christ — ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ [en tōi mustēriōi tou Christou] We looked at Paul’s use of the word ‘mystery’ in the last lesson and will not repeat ourselves here. The exact sense of ‘mystery of Christ’ is discussed; it could mean the following:

‘the mystery of which Christ is the Author’ — most of whom I have read does not believe Paul to have meant this.

‘the mystery relating to Christ’ — “It seems best on the whole to take the ... view, ‘the mystery relating to the Christ,’ i.e., the revelation of the long-hidden purpose of God regarding the Christ as not for Israel only, but also for the Gentiles.” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 304]

‘the mystery which consists in Christ’ — “[T]he mystery of Christ’ may best be understood as the mystery which consists in Christ, the mystery which is disclosed in him.” [Bruce, 313] “In light of Paul’s coming definition of the mystery as the close bond across ethnic lines between all Christians (v. 6), he is probably thinking here of the leading role that Christ plays in bringing unity to believers, according to 2:14-22.” [Thielman, 197]

v 5 — **which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets:** — “The contrast in the verse has three parts to it. The first and most basic focuses on the revelation of the mystery: ‘was not made known’ / ‘has been revealed.’ ... His plan to have one Church out of Jews and Gentiles was something that had to be disclosed by God himself. In this formulation the contrast is a stark and absolute one. It is not as if previously there was a partial knowledge of God’s plan. [Paul’s] notion of ‘mystery’ involves a hidden purpose of God that has only now been revealed and not before. Even the OT writers were ignorant of the sort of blessing that was to come to the Gentile.... The second part of the verse’s contrast makes the time element explicit: ‘in other generations’ / ‘now.’ ... The third and perhaps climactic part of the contrast ... is that identifying the recipients of the revelation ... ‘to the sons of men’ / ‘to his holy apostles and to prophets.’ The formulation of the first half of his contrast is of course a Hebraism for humans. Knowledge of God’s purpose was previously inaccessible to humanity as such, but in the new period he chose a special group of people to be recipients of his disclosure, the apostles and prophets.” [Lincoln, 177f]

SENTENCE STRUCTURE — v. 5 consists of two balancing statements, a negative and a positive, each with three items: a designation relating to time, a verb denoting revelation, and the mention of the recipients (or non-recipients) of the revelation:

TIME	VERB (FOCUSING ON THE REVELATION)	THE RECIPIENTS OR NON-RECIPIENTS
<i>Which in other ages</i>	<i>was not made known</i>	<i>unto the sons of men</i>
<i>as it is now</i>	<i>revealed</i>	<i>unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit</i>

CONTRASTING BETWEEN AGES — “The two halves of the verse are related by [‘as’, ὥς, hōs]; they indicate an absolute contrast between a past period of ignorance and a present one of knowledge, the past period being in effect that of the OT and the present that of the NT. But was there complete ignorance in the OT concerning God’s plans for the Gentiles? It is not difficult to find passages which allow a place for them (Gen 12.1-3; 18.18; Isa 2.2-4; 11.10; 34.22; 49.6; 60.3; Jer 3.17; Jon 4; Zech 9.9f). [One commentator] points out that some of these texts are understood in this way in the NT (Isa 42.6; 49.6 in Lk 2.32; Gen 12.3; 17.5; 28.14 in Gal 3.7f, 29). The NT also contains places where it is implied that the writers of the OT were not entirely ignorant in respect of God’s intentions towards the Gentiles (Rom 1.2; 9.25f; 13.9ff; Gal 3.8; Acts 15.15ff; 17.11f; 1 Pet 1.10-12). *In light of this [‘as’, ὥς, hōs] could be given a comparative meaning, ‘as clearly as’; God’s purpose for the Gentiles was not understood as clearly in the OT as now after the death and resurrection of Christ. How does such an understanding accord with the concept of revelation to Paul in v. 3? It suggested something new, not that Paul came to appreciate a truth which had lain hidden from the Jews though written in their scriptures.... In the commission to the Twelve (Mt 28.16-20; Acts 1.8) to go into all the world the command is presented as something new and not as the unfolding of an existing though partly veiled secret. Eph 3.2ff stands under the general schema in relation to revelation of ‘once hidden – now revealed’ which appears to exclude OT revelation. There is both continuity and discontinuity between the testaments; our passages stresses the discontinuity, perhaps over-stresses it, but it is corrected elsewhere by the importance given to the OT by [Paul] when he quotes it.” [Best, 305f]*

which — ὃ [ho] *this refers back to ‘mystery’* either in v. 3a or v. 4. If it refers back to v. 3a then v. 3b, 4 must be parenthetical and v. 5 probably jointed with them in the parenthesis (as shown in the Geneva Bible, KJV and NKJV). Ernest Best believes it better to choose the connection to v. 4 (as shown in the Douay-Rheims, ASV, NASV, RSV, NIV, ESV, YLT). The meaning if unaffected whichever linkage is chosen.

‘IN OTHER GENERATIONS OF A DIFFERENT KIND’ — **in other ages** — ἐν ἑτέροις γενεαῖς [en heterais geneais] “The word ‘ages’ is *genea*, ‘the period covered by a generation of men,’ thus, ‘a generation.’ The word ‘other’ is *heteros*, ‘another of a different kind.’ ... ‘In accordance with which you are able when you read to understand my insight into the mystery of the Christ which in other and different generations was not made known.’” [Wuest, 82] ‘generation’ = “the period covered

by a generation of men (Luke i. 20; Acts xiv. 16, xv. 21; Col. i. 26) as well as the generation or race itself.” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 304] There are two different Greek words used to express ‘other, another’:

- ἄλλος [allos] which is defined as ‘other, another; generally another person or thing of the same kind’ [Friberg Lexicon] An interesting verse using this word is found in John on the night of Jesus’ betrayal: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (John 14:16 KJV) God the Father was to send ‘another’ Comforter, ‘another of the same kind’ as Jesus. This could be said to speak directly to the deity of the Holy Spirit.
- ἕτερος [heteros] with a basic meaning ‘other, different; qualitatively another of a different kind, different, not identical with what was previously referred to’ [Friberg Lexicon] This is the word used in our verse.

We can see those meanings being carried over into our English language. One of those in our Sunday School class is a Medical Doctor student and he gave the following example:

*In medicine, ‘transplants’ or ‘grafts’ use various prefixes to describe what kind of graft they are. A **heterograft** or a graft/transplant using heterologous tissue is when it is between different species. For example, a pig heart valve being transplanted into a human heart to replace a bad valve. A pig is indeed very different, strange, foreign, alien compared to a human. Different tissue, different species. They are not at all the same. An **allograft** describes transplants between the same species. For example, these are the typical ‘transplants’ people usually hear about involving kidney, liver, blood transplants from either living donors or cadavers. They are tissues from different members, but all of the same species. Hence, the ‘different and same’ idea built into one term.*

So Paul is speaking of the generations before his generation that was of a different kind, they were without the revelation of the mystery being spoken of in this passage.

GOD WITHHELD THIS KNOWLEDGE — was not made known — οὐκ ἐγνωρίσθη [ouk egnōrīsthē] “*The passive [‘made known’] implies that human ignorance in this connection came from God and was not simply the result of human weakness.*” [Best, 306] ‘Was made known’ is an aorist passive, repeating the reverse of verse 3. “*The passive indicates that the previous generations were ignorant of the mystery – it was something that could not be acquired by self-assertion, only by revelation.*” [Hoehner, 438]

NO SPECIFIC GROUP OF MANKIND IS DESIGNATED — to the sons of men, — τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων [tois huiōis tōn anthrōpōn] “*The non-recipients of the revelation were ‘the sons of men’, a frequent biblical idiom for humanity in general, or all Israel (Gen 11.5; Ps 11.2; Joel 1.12; Jer 38.19; Dan 3.82; Mk 3.28); occasionally it can refer to particular people (Ps 79.18; Ezek 2.1, 3); in this case the singular is used. Its OT usage however gives no reason for seeing it in v. 5 as including the prophets and patriarchs. If it refers to all humanity then that includes all Israel.*” [Best, 306] Some narrow the reference ‘the sons of men’ to only the OT prophets since the parallelism is that of ‘NT apostles and prophets’ but that is unnecessary nor warranted. “*[This is] to be understood, not the OT prophets as contrasted with the ‘Apostles and prophets’ of the next clause, but men generally and in the absolute sense.*” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 304] “*Nor is Paul making the point that men whose fathers were only mere men were incapable of appropriating these truths under the old covenant. They were in themselves no more capable after Christ came than before. The apostle is stressing the fact that the mystery had not yet been universally revealed.*” [Wood, Ephesians on CD]

THE NT INTERPRETS THE OT — “*Before the church age no person, not even the greatest of God’s prophets, had anything but a glimpse of the truth that Paul now discloses. The Old Testament teachings that relate to this mystery can only be understood clearly in light of New Testament revelation. We know the meaning of many Old Testament passages only because they are explained in the New (cf. Heb. 11:39-40; 1 Pet. 1:10-12).*” [MacArthur, 90]

as it has now been revealed — ὡς νῦν ἀπεκαλύφθη [hōs nun apekaluphthē] Referring to the period in which the apostles and prophets existed.

as now — ὡς νῦν [hōs nun] “*The ὡς [hōs] has its proper comparative force. The fact of the revelation made in pre-Christian times to the fathers and the prophets is not questioned. The matter in view is the measure or manner of the revelation.* The νῦν [nun] = ‘now,’ in these Christian times, and the aorist ἀπεκαλύφθη [apekaluphthē, ‘to reveal’] defines the fuller revelation as made definitely at a former period in these times.” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK Testament, 304] Depending upon how one takes the adverbial conjunction ‘as’, it could mean (1) a comparison of degree, meaning that the mystery was partially revealed in the OT but now has fully been revealed in the NT (so Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom; Aquinas, Calvin, Hodge, Moule, Westcott, Hendriksen); (2) some consider it to be a comparison of kind, meaning it was revealed for the first time in the NT (so Bruce, Mitton, Barth, Lincoln, Best, O’Brien). Hoehner believes the second interpretation to be best: “In the present context it would mean that the mystery was not made known in other generations because only now has it been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.... Paul wrote in verse 9 that the mystery was hidden for ages in God.... The same temporal adverb in Eph 3:10 further substantiates this: ‘In order that the manifold wisdom of God (which is the mystery of Jews and Gentiles united in one body) might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places through the church.’ If the heavenly hosts in OT times did not know of this mystery, it is most unlikely that the people of that era would have known about it.... Accordingly, the mystery that was known to no one before the NT era is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets.” [Hoehner, 439f]

REVELATION — ἀπεκαλύφθη [apekaluphthē] The verb is used in the LXX 111x (89x in the canonical books) and translates nine different Hebrew words, but 76x it's used to translate a single Hebrew word meaning 'to uncover, to disclose, to reveal.' In the NT it is used 26x, 13x by Paul and only here in Ephesians (interestingly, it is not used in the book of Revelation, or ἀποκάλυψις [apokalupsis, 'the revelation']). Note however the noun form of this word is used in Eph 1:17; 3:3. "The verb ἀποκαλύπτω [apokaluptō] comes from καλύπτω [kaluptō], meaning 'to cover, hide, conceal,' and ἀπο – [apo –], 'from,' and hence it has the meaning 'to uncover, disclose, reveal' something that has been previously hidden.... *It maintains the idea of unveiling something that has been hidden (Rom 1:17-18; 1 Cor 2:10; Gal 1:16). In the NT it always has the theological significance that what was hidden in God and unknown to humans has now been unveiled. It is 'not the impartation of knowledge, but the actual unveiling of intrinsically hidden facts...'. Therefore, revelation is some hidden thing or a mystery of God that is unveiled by God and cannot be discovered by human investigation. In the present context, it is the uncovering of a mystery that has been hidden in God throughout the ages (vv. 5, 9).* Both this verb and ἐγνωρίσθη [egnōrīsthē, 'to make known'] are passives to indicate that it was only God who could reveal the mystery." [Hoehner, 441]

'THE PRESENT IMMEDIACY OF THE REVELATION' — *"The Greek behind 'has ... been revealed' is in the aorist tense, which refers to specific acts or events. Coupled with 'now', it here indicates the present immediacy of the revelation, which was given exclusively to New Testament 'holy apostles and prophets,' and not to any other persons before or after them."* [MacArthur, 91]

to His holy apostles and prophets — τοῖς ἁγίοις ἀποστόλοις αὐτοῦ καὶ προφήταις [tois hagiois apostolois autou kai prophētais] This same combination was used in Eph 2:20. "[T]he apostles and prophets were the superior officers in the Gospel dispensation; the former design the twelve apostles of Christ, and the latter such who had the gift of interpreting the prophecies of the Old Testament, and of the foretelling things to come, having received gifts from Christ to fit them for such offices." [Gill, 79]

THE PROPHETS ARE NT PROPHETS — *"[I]t is proposed that the prophets here are NT prophets, as in 2:20, for the following reasons.*

- *First, the same order is used in listing apostles before prophets, as in 2:20, where it speaks about the foundation of the new temple, the church.*
- *Second, in 4:11 the apostles and prophets, again listed in the same order, were given as foundational gifted people for the purpose of preparing saints for ministry and building up this new body, the church.*
- *Third, the present verse talks about the revelation of the mystery which has been revealed in the NT era and not OT times.*
- *Furthermore, there is no indication that the OT prophets received revelation to evangelize the Gentiles.*

The imagery here is of prophets who were contemporaries of the apostles, thus, NT prophets." [Hoehner, 442] "That the group is now the recipient of revelation implies that the prophets belong to the same period as the apostles, i.e. they are Christian prophets." [Best, 307]

THE REVELATION GIVEN TO MORE THAN JUST PAUL — *"A more considerable difficulty seems to arise from the statement that the mystery of the free admission of the Gentiles had been revealed to 'the apostles and prophets,' viz. as a body. For this is precisely the special doctrine which St. Paul seems elsewhere, and here in ver. 3, to claim as his own, and which, at least at first, was not accepted by the other apostles (Gal. ii.). In ver. 8, also, this is recognised as the distinctive characteristic of St. Paul's apostleship.... The difficulty, however, is met by the consideration that, notwithstanding the doubts which the other apostles at first entertained, they afterwards fully accepted the doctrine as taught by St. Paul, Acts xv., Gal. ii. 7 ff., and that long before the present Epistle was written. The 'prophets' are manifestly Christian prophets."* [Abbott, 82f] "[A]n apostle is an official delegate of Jesus Christ (see 1:1; 2:20; cf. also 4:11), commissioned for the specific tasks of proclaiming authoritatively the message in oral and written form and of establishing and building up of the churches. A prophet is one who is endowed by the Holy Spirit with the gift of prophecy for the purpose of edification, comfort, encouragement (1 Cor 14:3, 31), and the enablement to understand and communicate the mysteries and revelation of God to the church (12:10; 13:2; 14:22-25, 30-31) and his prophecy may include a predictive element (1 Thess 3:4; 4:6, 14-18; Gal 5:21).... The plural nouns indicate ... the revelation, believing Jews and Gentiles united into one body, was given to many and not just to Paul." [Hoehner, 441f] "The Church is built upon the twofold foundation of apostles and prophets ..., the apostles representing the authority of primary witness to the Gospel facts, while prophets represent the living guidance of the Spirit by which the facts were apprehended in ever fuller meaning and scope." [Bruce, 315]

THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS PRESENTED AS A SINGLE GROUP — "Scholars debate whether the adjective ἁγίοις [hagiois], 'holy,' and the possessive pronoun αὐτοῦ [autou], 'his,' qualify only [apostles] or both [apostles and prophets].... [T]here is only one article for both nouns, which most likely indicates that though apostles and prophets are distinct they are treated as one group and similarly the adjective and pronoun mostly likely qualify both. Both received revelation and both belong to God." [Hoehner, 442]

THOUGH VIEWED AS A SINGLE GROUP, THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS WERE DISTINCT — *While placing the apostles and prophets together, note Paul does make a distinction. "Paul intends, therefore, to refer to 'his holy apostles and prophets.' If this reading is correct, then it would be consistent with the distinction that Paul seems to make between*

apostles and prophets in 4:11, where he sees them as two separate groups and probably lists apostles first because of their primary importance.” [Thielman, 199]

DOES THE TERM ‘HOLY APOSTLES’ DEMAND THE EPISTLE WAS WRITTEN AFTER THE APOSTOLIC ERA? — *“How can the writer, if himself an apostle, use such an expression? Some critics answer unhesitatingly that it is incredible that an apostle should do so, and that the expressions betrays the view which belonged to a later age.... The difficulty seems to arise from the use of the word ‘holy,’ and the corresponding words in other modern languages, to express the personal character of ‘holiness.’ But ἅγιος [hagios, ‘holy, sanctify, set apart’] is used of anything that is set apart for a sacred purpose. So we have ‘holy prophets,’ Luke i. 70; Acts iii. 21. All Christians are by their calling ἅγιοι [hagioi, ‘holy ones, set-apart ones, saints’], and St. Paul frequently uses the word where he himself is included (e.g. 1 Cor. vi. 2 and Col. i. 26). When he calls all believers ἅγιοι [hagioi, ‘holy ones, set-apart ones, saints’], what delicacy should prevent him from calling the apostles by the same word?” [Abbott, 82] “The adjective [holy] is considered by some a sign of non-apostolic authorship of the letter since it is a title of veneration used by a later generation of Christians and because the parallel passage in Col 1:26 uses the same word as a substantive meaning ‘saints.’ It is thought that Paul would not likely apply the term ‘holy’ to those with the same commission as his. Although this is the only instance that apostles are designated ‘holy,’ it was common in the NT to call prophets ‘holy’ (Luke 1:70; Acts 3:21; 2 Pet 3:2). If ordinary Christians are called ‘saints’ (i.e., ‘holy’; e.g., Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1) and ‘holy brothers’ (Heb 3:1), certainly there is no reason that this expression could not be used to describe both the apostles and prophets as ‘holy.’ ... [T]he term ‘holy applied to those who were ordinary Israelites (Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:19), to priests (Lev 21:7), to those who took the Nazarite vow (Num 6:5, 8), and to prophets (2 Kgs 4:9). Both the substantive [i.e., when the word is used to mean ‘saints’ or ‘holy ones’] and the adjective [i.e., when the word is used to describe an object as ‘holy temple’ or ‘holy prophets’] can be used of things, places, and persons, and it does not in itself connote any inherent holiness. Thus, the basic idea is that which is consecrated to God or to God’s service.” [Hoehner, 443] “[H]oly’ in its use here must be seen as retaining its basic meaning of ‘set apart for God.’ It is simply that the context colors this so that the apostles are now characterized as specially set apart by God to receive revelation.” [Lincoln, 179]*

ISRAEL IS NOT EQAUL TO THE CHURCH — *“It must be remembered from the discussion of 2:11-22 that for Ephesians there is a striking element of discontinuity between the Church and Israel, whereby the Church is a new creation which transcends the categories of Jew and Gentile.” [Lincoln, 177]*

by the Spirit — ἐν πνεύματι [en pneumati] “by the Spirit” refers back to the verb to show it was revealed by the Holy Spirit. *“The Spirit is the divine agency of God’s revelation through these men. ‘Know this first of all.’ Peter explains, ‘that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God’ (2 Pet. 1:20-21). This was the fulfillment of our Lord’s promise in John 14:25-26 and 15:26-27.” [MacArthur, 91]* The final phrase, ‘in the Spirit’, could be connected with (a) the verb ‘revealed’, (b) ‘his holy apostles and prophets’, or (c) the ‘prophets’ alone. Undoubtedly it could not refer to the prophets alone since that would separate ‘his holy apostles’ from ‘prophets’, but the prophets belong to God as much as the apostles and since all prophecy comes from the Spirit, this would hardly need emphasized. Also in Eph 2:20 both groups are united and therefore would be unnatural to force a separation here. Also (b) could be disqualified because if ‘in the Spirit’ was connected to ‘his holy apostles and prophets’ then the implication would be there are apostles and prophets who had no connection with the Spirit if such a connection was necessary here. The best solution therefore is to connect ‘in the Spirit’ with ‘revealed’, the sense being ‘the revelation is through the Spirit.’ [Best, 308]

NOTE AGAIN PAUL’S REFERENCE TO THE TRINITY — *the Father reveals the mystery of Christ by the Holy Spirit. “By the Spirit, i.e. revealed by the Spirit. Though without the article, refers to the Holy Spirit, the immediate author of these divine communications. It follows from the scriptural doctrine of the Trinity, which teaches the identity as to substance of the Father, Son, and Spirit, that the act of the one is the act of the others. Paul, therefore, refers the revelations which he received sometimes to God, as in verse 3; sometimes to Christ as in Galatians 1:12; sometimes to the Spirit.” [Hodge, 113]*

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY GIVEN UNTIL THE WRITTEN REVELATION WAS COMPLETED — *“By the Spirit – This proves that those who exercised the office of prophet in the Christian church were inspired. They were persons endowed in this manner for the purpose of imparting to the newly formed churches the doctrines of the Christian system. There is no evidence that this was designed to be a permanent order of people in the church. They were necessary for settling the church on a permanent basis, in the absence of a full written revelation, and when the apostles were away. When the volume of revelation was finished, and the doctrines of the gospel were fully understood, the functions of the office ceased.” [Barnes, Ephesians on CD]*