

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he spoke to them about several mysteries. One of them is recorded in the second chapter of his first letter to them.

1Co 2:7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, which God has hidden, predetermining it before the world for our glory;

There are some who, because they see, “mystery”, “hidden” and “before the world for our glory”, identify this mystery with the mystery of Ephesians and Colossians;

Eph 3:1 For this cause, I, Paul, am the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you nations,

Eph 3:2 if you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given to me toward you,

Eph 3:3 that by revelation He made known to me the mystery

Col 1:25 of which I became a minister, according to the administration of God given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God;

Col 1:26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.

These expositors place the present dispensation among the ministries of Paul during the Acts period. They perpetuate the concept that the book of Acts was a progressive revelation or transitory period where God gradually introduced something new and previously hidden away from the saints. While this seems to be a reasonable conclusion it is a hasty one. As students of the Bible, it is imperative that we apply the Bible study rules as found in Phils.1:9-10 and 2 Tim.2:15. By testing things that differ and rightly dividing the Word of truth serious error can be avoided.

Immediate and remote contexts must be considered. The dispensational setting of the Acts period was the “end of the ages” not the beginning of anything. Ephesians was the unveiling of a new dispensation which has been in operation for nearly 2000 years: what a difference!

The following are references written during the period covered by the book of Acts. Please study these verses carefully:

1. Acts 17:31 (about to judge the world)
2. Roms. 13:11-1, 16:20, 1Thess.4:15, 17 (“we” includes Paul who did not expect to die back then)
3. 1Thess. 5:4 (how would the Day overtake them if it was 2000 years away?)
4. Hebs. 9:26 (Christ sacrificed at the end of the age, not the beginning of one),
5. Hebs.10:37, James 5:8-9, 1Peter4:7, 1John 2:18 (last time is really last hour) and Rev.1:1.

Compare the previous verses with similar verses found in 1 Corinthians:

1Co 1:8 He shall also confirm you TO THE END, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1Co 7:29 But this I say, brothers, The TIME IS SHORT. ...

1Co 10:11 ... written for our warning on whom the ENDS OF THE world (AGE) have come.

1Co 15:51 Behold, I speak a mystery to you; WE (not they in the future) SHALL NOT ALL fall asleep (DIE), ..

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the mystery, the hidden wisdom of God it was written at the end, not to introduce something new. This is the first major difference.

So what is the mystery of 1Cor.2:7? To answer this we need to stay in the “end of the ages” context already established and in the letter context as follows;

1Co 2:1-2 And I, brothers, when I came to you, did not come with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Notice, Paul only taught them the Lord Jesus and Him crucified (they were fleshly Christians and couldn't take anything deeper, see 1Cor.3:1-2). If we hold this before us then, it will not surprise us to read that the mystery of 1Cor.2 is linked with Christ's crucifixion;

1Co 2:7-8 But we speak *the* wisdom of God in a mystery, which God has hidden, predetermining it before the world for our glory;

1Co 2:8 which none of the rulers of this world knew (for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory).

This mystery relates to the hidden wisdom of God which had they known they would not have crucified Jesus. This mystery relates to the Lord's crucifixion and who it really was that died on that cross, not the introduction of a new dispensation.

This mystery relates to who Jesus really was, Jehovah of the O.T., the Creator of the world, the "righteous servant that will justify many and bear their iniquities (Is. 53:11). It is in a context of wisdom and ignorance as it relates to the cross and who it was who died thereon. To follow Paul's theme about wisdom, foolishness and the cross, see these verses; 1Cor.1:17-21. Note very carefully this verse;

1Co 1:21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom did not know God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe.

By the wisdom of God, the world did not know Him; who He really was, God. Look at this verse;

1Co 1:24 But to them, the called-out ones, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The wisdom of God, previously hidden, is Christ (and HIM crucified). Now carefully consider 1Cor.2:7-8.

In the context of this mystery of 1Cor.2:7-8, we have the Jews asking for a sign;

1Co 1:22 For the Jews ask for a sign,

And we need to ask ourselves, "Which Jews asked for a sign?" The believing ones or the unbelieving ones? Back in Matthew 12:38 and 16:1, the Lord's enemies asked for a sign at a time of rejection and partial blindness on Israel (Matt.13:13-15 = Isaiah 6). It was at that time of rejection and blindness that the Lord started speaking to Israel in parables, the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven and the disciples asked why; Mat 13:11 He answered and said to them, Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but it is not given to them.

The mysteries of Matthew are in a context of knowledge given and withheld but despite this, the Lord called upon those who had ears to hear to hear, Matt.13:9. Even though the Lord's disciples had understood the mysteries of the Kingdom, his death burial and resurrection remained hidden until it was shown from the Scriptures, compare Luke 18:34 with 24:45-46.

Matthew 12 marked a turning point in the Lord's ministry. Prior to this He was teaching and proclaiming the kingdom of God publically and openly. After this rejection of Matt. 12 (v14), He spoke in mysteries/parables but still called Israel to hear. What is interesting to note is at this rejection point in Matt 12, the Lord asks the crowd not to make Him known and then quotes Isaiah which speaks of Gentiles trusting and hoping in the beloved servant (child) of God. See Matt.12:15-21 and Isaiah 42 which is a prophecy about restoration.

As noted, 1 Corinthians was written in the Acts period as part of Paul's ministry to the very Gentiles the Lord through Isaiah said would turn to Him. Paul's ministry among the Gentiles began in earnest at Acts 13 after the message had gone to Israel yet again and who had, for the most part rejected that message. Now the Lord is revealing mysteries of the Kingdom just as He did back in the gospels. What is so incredible is that Paul's authority to turn to the Gentiles is also found in the very prophet the Lord used back in Matt. 12. Let us see this in Acts 13;

Act 13:46 But speaking boldly, Paul and Barnabas said, It was necessary for the Word of God to be spoken to you first. But since indeed you put it far from you and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the nations.
Act 13:47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have set You to be a light of the nations, for salvation to the end of the earth." Isaiah 49:6.

In Matthew the Lord uses Isaiah which speaks of Gentiles hoping in the Lord and restoration to Israel in a context of national rejection. Please examine Isaiah 49 which is the divine authority for Paul to turn to the Gentiles in Acts 13 after Israel rejected the message. Isaiah 49 is about the restoration of Israel not the introduction of something new. Would it not be a mark of further divine inspiration if the O.T passages Paul uses in 1 Cor.1-2 also speak of Israel's restoration?

Israel as a nation, particularly her rulers, had rejected the message and as an act of mercy (Roms.11:25-32), God had given them hardness, "eyes not seeing". Paul refers to Isaiah 29:10 in Romans 11:8 which is related to Isaiah 6. It is the same in Matthew where Isaiah 6 is quoted against Israel. Paul's first recorded miracle in Acts 13 is to partially blind a Jew and Paul speaks of Israel's partial blindness in Romans 11:25. During the Acts period, in this dispensational setting of Israel's partial blindness and God's merciful judgment upon them, Gentiles were being saved according to the very prophet the Lord uses in the gospels, not according to the introduction of The Mystery in Ephesians and Colossians.

Isaiah in Matt.12-13, Isaiah in Acts 13 and Romans and now we find the same prophet in the 1& 2Corinthians context of a mystery about the hidden wisdom of God;

1Co 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

1Co 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those being lost, but to us being saved, it is the power of God.

1Co 1:19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will set aside the understanding of the perceiving ones."

1Cor.1:19 is a quote from Isaiah 29. Reading Isaiah 29 we find the prophet speaking of judgment and Israel's restoration. When would God destroy the wisdom of the wise? When the Lord returns to the earth, please see 1Cor.1:7-8.

Turning to the next verse in 1 Corinthians we find Paul using Isaiah again;

1Co 1:20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the lawyer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

This is a quote from Isaiah 33:18 speaking to the scribe and lawyer of Israel. If we read down Isaiah 33 we find another context of Israel's restoration. When would God destroy the wisdom of the world, at HIS return?

Please note in this portion of 1Cor., wisdom, foolishness, sign and the fact that Christ crucified is the power and wisdom of God. What is that mystery in chapter two? The hidden wisdom of God; Christ crucified a stumbling block and foolishness.

1Co 1:21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom did not know God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe.

1Co 1:22 For the Jews ask for a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom;

1Co 1:23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness.

1Co 1:24 But to them, the called-out ones, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Paul is inspired to use in 1 Corinthians Isaiah passages where the prophet speaks of the Holy One of Israel, Jehovah, the redeemer of Abraham and the peace of Jerusalem under His reign. It seems contradictory to think the mystery of 1 Cor. 2 is related to the Mystery of Ephesians which cannot be found in prophecy, and which has nothing to do with the earth, our Lord in titles relating to Israel and the rulers of Israel learning knowledge when He restores the Kingdom to Israel.

The Mystery of 1Cor.2:7 is more closely related to Matthew than Ephesians. It was written during the Acts where, like Matthew, Isaiah 6 and blindness is spoken against Israel yet hope for her remains. In both Matthew and Acts 13, Gentiles were being called out according to prophecy. The Lord and Paul refer back to prophecy about Israel, not to things the prophets knew nothing about. Perhaps Paul meant what he said in Acts 26:22. The Mystery of Ephesians and Colossians was hidden away from past ages and generations but the Mystery of 1Cor.2 is in a context of prophecy, it cannot relate to the post Acts mystery, test things differing.

In 1 Corinthians 1:24 Paul writes that Christ crucified is the power and wisdom of God. Paul quotes Isaiah which speaks of Jehovah. Who was Jesus? According to the prophecies Paul uses, Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah; Jehovah the Holy One of Israel. How would Jehovah, the God in covenant relationship with Israel redeem Abraham? By dying on the cross Himself, that is the power and wisdom of God which was predetermined before the world but hidden from the rulers of this world; that is Israel's rulers.

The context of 1Cor.2:7-8 is OT prophecy about Jehovah, the Holy One of Jacob redeeming and bringing Jerusalem to a quiet place, never to be disturbed. The glory of this mystery cannot be the glory of the heavenly places of Ephesians.

1Co 2:7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, which God has hidden, predetermining it before the world for our glory;

1Co 2:8 which none of the rulers of this world knew (for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory).

After writing about this mystery appertaining to the hidden wisdom of God, Paul speaks to the glory and to do so he turns back to the very same prophet he has been using frequently. Paul quotes Isaiah 64:4;

1Co 2:9 But as it is written, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard," nor has it entered into the heart of man, "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

Examine Isaiah 64-65 and note the restorative context of those Isaiah passages. If Paul once more turns back to prophecy about the restoration and rejoicing of God in Jerusalem and Israel after speaking of this mystery in 1 Cor. 2 then we must dismiss any thought that this mystery of 1 Cor. 2 is in any way related to the Dispensation of the grace of God in Ephesians and Colossians. The Mystery of Paul's post Acts letters has nothing to do with Israel's restoration or God rejoicing in Israel. If Paul turns back to prophecy when writing of the mystery in 1Cor.2, then we should turn in the same direction, not forward to truth not yet revealed to him.

As a footnote to this lesson, we might like to research 1 Cor.1:31 along with Jeremiah 9:24.

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