

STUDY NINE –THE RAPTURE... A MYSTERY FINALLY REVEALED II

INTRODUCTION

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)

Continued from last week:

The MYSTERY of the Riches of God's Glory Among the Gentiles

The mystery of the riches of God's glory among the Gentiles was absolutely unthinkable in Old Testament times, but it was revealed in Christ. Paul spoke of this mystery in Colossians 1:26-27 where he wrote that *"even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."*

Paul stated this mystery of the riches of God's glory among the Gentiles was a mystery that was "hid" from ages and generations. Paul ardently stated that although this mystery was once deeply ensconced and hidden from view, in Christ it has been made "manifest." The word "manifest" is translated from the word phaneroo, which means to bring that which is invisible into the light. It means to enlighten, to illuminate, or to make plain in order to see and understand. Paul then added that God's intention was always to make "known" the "riches" of God's glory among the saints.

Although this secret was wrapped tightly until the time came for it to be unwrapped and to become manifest, today no one questions God's glory among the Gentiles.

The MYSTERY that Jews and Gentiles Could Be Members of One Body

The mystery of Jews and Gentiles being members of one Body was a completely unthinkable thought in Old Testament times, but in Christ this mystery has been revealed, and it has become a reality.

Paul referred to this mystery in Ephesians 3:2-6, where he wrote, *"If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 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: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel. "*

Notice that the word "mystery" appears twice in these verses where Paul wrote of Jews and Gentiles becoming members of one Body in Christ. However, Paul stated that *"...by revelation he [God made known unto me the mystery...."*

The word "revelation" appears again in connection with mysteries. This is once again an interpretation of the Greek word apokalupsis, which refers to something that has been veiled or hidden for a long time and then suddenly becomes clear and visible to the mind or eye. But the mystery that Jews and Gentiles could be members of one Body was such an amazing mystery that Paul said, *"...In other ages [this mystery) was not made known unto the sons of men...,"* but now it has been "revealed" first to apostles and prophets by the Spirit. Paul used the word "revealed" in this sequence of verses to state that Jews

UNDERSTANDING END TIMES

and Gentiles becoming members of one Body in Christ was always God's plan, but it was incomprehensible until the Holy Spirit pulled back the veil and revealed it first to holy apostles and prophets.

Against all odds and societal norms, a single, united Body emerged and became supernaturally, mysteriously, blended — joined, fused, intermingled, amalgamated, and divinely melded — into one, single Body of believers! Think of the magnificent, supernatural unifying work God performed by His Spirit at the moment of the new birth, in which, in one instant, all classes and distinctions — Jew, Greek, etc. (see Galatians 3:28) — vanished inside this one, new Body, the Church.

The mystery that Jews and Gentiles could be members of one Body was previously incomprehensible, but in Christ, this mystery was divinely revealed. Now the mystery that Jews and Gentiles can be members of one Body in Christ is a well-established New Testament fact and no longer a secret.

The MYSTERY that Israel Will One Day Be Saved

The mystery that Israel will one day be saved is revealed in Romans 11:25 and 26, where Paul wrote, *"For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved..."* In context, Paul was writing about Gentiles being grafted into the Vine and about a future day when the fullness of the Gentiles will be reached and Israel will recognize Jesus the Messiah and be saved.

Although the mystery that Israel will one day be saved in Christ the Messiah was previously incomprehensible, in the pages of the New Testament, this mystery has been divinely revealed. Now we confidently anticipate that future moment, and it is no longer a secret.

The MYSTERY of Iniquity

In Second Thessalonians 2:7, Paul wrote, *"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work..."* Although the mystery of iniquity was a previously kept secret, it has been revealed in Scripture.

Paul states that the mystery of iniquity has been working a long time. It is a covert, secret plan that the devil has been slowly executing right under people's noses, as he methodically and tediously walks the world away from the law of God to become a society that eventually throws off moral restraints. When Paul wrote about the "mystery of iniquity," he was speaking of a clandestine plan that will be culminated in the last of the last days to lead society worldwide into a state of rebellion, or mutiny, against God.

The mystery of iniquity was hidden, but in the pages of the New Testament — the wrappings were also removed from this mystery, it was divinely revealed, and the mystery of iniquity is no longer a secret.

The MYSTERY of the Rapture of the Church

All the previous points covered were mysteries that were unknown before they were finally revealed in New Testament times. Likewise, the mystery of the rapture of the Church was a secret that was completely hidden from view until the Holy Spirit pulled back the curtains and revealed it in the pages of the New Testament.

This mystery was especially revealed in the writings of the apostle Paul, who referred to the rapture as a mystery in First Corinthians 15:51. He wrote, *"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed..."*

"WE SHALL NOT ALL SLEEP, BUT WE SHALL ALL BE CHANGED"

Paul said we will not "all sleep." These words are translated from the Greek word that describes the sleep of death. Paul used exactly the same word in First Thessalonians 4:15 to describe the "dead" in Christ — those who died in the faith of Jesus. But in this verse in First Corinthians, he stated explicitly that not everyone will sleep or die — that there will be a generation of authentic believers who will escape death.

These are the saints who will not "sleep," or die (see 1 Corinthians 15:51).

In this verse, Paul emphatically stated that the dead bodies of the righteous whom Christ resurrects — and the remaining remnant of spiritually alive believers who will be left at the time of the coming of the Lord — will be "changed." This means that at this moment, both the dead bodies of the righteous and the living bodies of vibrant believers will be miraculously altered, changed, exchanged, and transformed into a new type of body. In each case, it will be an instantaneous, miraculous, and supernatural transformation.

What these transformed bodies will be like will be discussed toward the end of this study, but right now, let's see how fast Paul said this divine transformation will happen!

THIS TRANSFORMATION WILL OCCUR IN MICROSCOPIC MOMENT - IN THE "TWINKLING OF AN EYE"

In First Corinthians 15:52, Paul wrote that all these events will occur *"in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump..."*

The word "moment" is interpreted from the Greek word atomos, which is a word that describes an indivisible moment, a split second, or an instant. It is where we get the word "atom." It denotes something tiny or microscopic. In this case, it pictures a microscopic, indivisible moment of time.

Paul then defined this tiny moment of time as the "twinkling of an eye." The word "twinkling" is a word that describes a twitch, a blink, or something that happens so fast it is undetectable. One scholar notes that the speed of an eye twitch or the blink of an eye is a tenth of a second or 100 milliseconds.

In summary, in a microscopic, indivisible moment of time — like the twinkling, twitch, or blink of an eye — the bodies of the righteous dead will be raised, and those who are alive, living vibrantly in the faith, will be transformed in their bodies, and they will be caught up to meet the Lord.

ONCE AGAIN, WE SEE "THE TRUMP OF GOD" IN SCRIPTURE

Exactly as he did in First Thessalonians 4:16, Paul again, in his first epistle to the Corinthian church, reiterated that this grand event will be triggered by the sound of the last "trump." In Second Thessalonians 2, Paul was addressing end-time events, including the rapture of the Church. The majority of biblical scholars agree that the words "gathering together" are a rewording of what Paul wrote in First Thessalonians 4:17 about the Rapture, when all authentic Christians alive on the earth will be "caught up together" to meet the Lord in the air.

When this trumpet is blasted, the bodies of the righteous dead will be raised out of their graves with newly transformed bodies that are no longer subject to the effects of wear, tear, and age. And authentic living Christians at that time will be likewise miraculously transformed as they join those who have been resurrected. Both the dead in Christ and vibrant, authentic Christians who are alive in that moment will be transformed and freed from frailty, mortality, and corruption.

In that moment, what has been the Church Age will officially close. The trumpet blast will announce this closure, and the next event — the seven-year period known as the Tribulation — will have begun. Thus,

UNDERSTANDING END TIMES

the "last trumpet" will signal the consummation, or end, of this present age and the beginning of the Tribulation when great wrath will be poured out upon the earth.

I remind you again that Paul was a linguist, and he was very aware of the meaning of the word *salpinx*. If we look at this Greek word from the standpoint of how it was used in the ancient world, we can know that:

- In the moment this trumpet is blasted, it will be the blasting of a war trumpet.
- In the moment this trumpet is blasted, its deafening and invincible sound will send shivers of terror to the enemies of God in every realm, spiritual and physical.
- In the moment this trumpet is blasted, God will summon His people to break camp, advance, and move upward, which refers to the resurrection of the bodies of the righteous dead and the rapture of the living remnant of authentic Christians at that time.
- In the moment his trumpet is blasted, it will muster all of Heavens troops to engage in the fight of the ages.
- In the moment this trumpet is blasted, it will be a declaration that this battle will be consummated in total victory.
- In the moment this trumpet is blasted, it will be a declaration that the judgments against the ungodly issued from God's court of law are about to be carried out as righteous judgment is poured out on the earth.

Paul twice used this word to tell us that when this trump blasts at the time of the resurrection of the righteous dead and the rapture of the Church, it will be a divine summoning of both the righteous dead and the living.

Isn't the faithfulness of God amazing: Not only do we possess a living hope in a living God and a risen Savior — God reveals in His Word what we can expect as the Church Age ends. And He informs us that all these events will be signalled by a trumpet blast.

And that blast will be a living proclamation that:

- The Church Age is closed.
- The Tribulation is starting.
- Heaven's court is ready to execute judgment against the ungodly.
- God's foes will be vanquished!