

## THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SECRET

**The key to understanding the context of the Church  
within divine providence**

**{Revised Edition}**

Richard L. Barker

*Unto me who is the most inferior of all the saints was this grace granted that I should proclaim to the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ so as to enlighten everyone regarding the **fellowship of the secret hidden in God through the ages**, who created all things through Jesus Christ – that through the Church should now be made known to the sovereignties and authorities in the heavens, the multi-faceted nature of God's wisdom according to the purpose of the ages made in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Published by Richard Barker on Free-ebook.com

The Fellowship of the Secret

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ISBN 9781311995247

Adapted from the e-book originally published by Matador under the title "Saul of Tarsus and the Fellowship of the Secret" in March 2015.

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## Introduction

This book resulted from an extraordinary spiritual experience I encountered a few summers ago in which I came to understand the Bible in quite a new way. The writings of the apostle Paul are the focus of my synopsis, starting with the passage in Ephesians from which the book's title is derived. Some English language Bibles translate the phrase "fellowship of the mystery" whilst others utilize a textual variant which reads in the Greek "*oikonomia*" (administration or dispensation) rather than "*koinonia*" (fellowship) - either of which will suffice given that Paul is here referring to the Church, being both a community or fellowship but also an administration pertaining to the gospel age. I will show that it was the unforetold nature and racial make-up of this sacred assembly that led to Saul of Tarsus being called "out due of time" as the thirteenth faithful apostle, Matthias having replaced Judas Iscariot to make up the twelve. That was so that Paul might "*enlighten everyone concerning the fellowship pertaining to the secret (plan) known only to God who had created all things through Jesus Christ; (this mystery or secret) having been hidden through the ages from the authorities of Heaven is brought to light through the Church, so revealing the multi-faceted nature of God's wisdom regarding His purpose for the ages which He accomplished in Christ* (Eph3:9-11). God's secret plan, a mystery from our perspective, was revealed to Paul and somewhat cryptically by him; its meaning obscured further by some spurious translations such that its significance has largely been hidden from the Church, in accordance I believe with divine intentions for her pathway of discovery. Once Paul's meaning here is grasped and taken together with its related passage in Romans (ch11 vv11-15), one's understanding of divine providence is transformed as one comes to appreciate that the exclusive Covenants of Promise pertaining to Israel and the Church are just a part of a broader, more inclusive redemptive strategy.

In terms of prophecy, what I refer to in shorthand as "the fellowship of the secret" explains why the expectations of the Old Testament prophets and even some of Jesus's prophetic statements in the Gospels are neither being fulfilled in reality nor "realized within the spiritual sphere by the Church", apart from in a certain dual perspective sense that I explain in my opening chapter, by which I mean that what had been anticipated for the Temple but not fulfilled there, will be, or has already been paralleled within Church history. Other matters such as any applicable geopolitical considerations pertaining to the Jewish apocalypse and Israel's status as the "children of the Kingdom" are not currently being fulfilled, rather placed on hold until in Paul's words "*the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*" (Rom11:25). That is referring to the time when Christ shall come in glory to herald what Scripture variously describes as "the renaissance" (Mt19:28), the liberation of the created order (Rom8:19-23) or "the restoration of all things" (Acts3:21). Traditionally many understand the Parousia to be the end of the space-time universe when Christians (and some might add faithful Jews) are transported to Heaven and everyone else is effectively consigned to the cosmic wastepaper basket. Their understanding of the Good News, and in the past my understanding, was that only the members of the exclusive Covenants of Promise were the people that God intended to reconcile to Himself and bring into His Kingdom. The bulk of humanity, as the most influential theologian of the first Christian millennium Augustine of Hippo made a point of emphasizing, were destined for eternal punishment in accordance with God's good pleasure: "*Many more are left under punishment than are delivered from it, in order that it may thus be shown what was due to all*" <sup>A</sup>.

Many Christians have come to perceive or at least sense in their bones that such a cosmic outcome is inconsistent with the term "Gospel" (Good News) as well as God's nature as Scripture presents it and Jesus as the incarnate Word revealed it. With, I believe, the Spirit's help, I have set out how a

more beneficent providence may faithfully be **adduced from Scripture** without undermining the vital utility of gospel grace or the role of the Church. Like the apostle Paul I have come to know God to be a Philanthropist (Titus3:4 cf. Greek), a depiction utilized by some of the earliest Church fathers as the necessarily small-scale patristic study I have incorporated affirms. Unfortunately for many, such broader benign providence cannot be delineated without critically re-examining the biblical hermeneutics of one of Rome's most revered doctors – Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. His synopsis, whilst not wholly endorsed was substantially utilized by the Early Catholic Church and built upon a thousand years later by the Protestant Reformers who corroborated his emphasis on human moral ineptitude and one-dimensional grace. Such a schema does not lend itself to amelioration; it must either be taken as read or virtually redrawn from scratch. Of necessity I have undertaken the latter, providing, I trust, a thoroughly coherent biblical synopsis, incorporated for the moment in this e-book, being an especially timely technological development for the propagation of such a disclosure, providing readers with online access to the Greek and Hebrew linear translations of the Bible<sup>B</sup> as well as to the writings of those earliest (apostolic) Fathers who had not been entirely dependent on biblical exegesis having **heard** the Good News and its essential soteriology directly from the apostles or their immediate appointees.

I am no academic and this book is hardly the result of a life-long study, for my understanding of certain biblical passages was transformed during the ten or so days I was conscious of the Holy Spirit's immediate presence, a time of weeping, rejoicing and virtual nervous breakdown – an experience that from my conservative Christian background I was not expecting or barely open to receiving. However, the new understanding I have come to has been confirmed at the personal level by its ability to resolve many tensions and inconsistencies within Scripture, in the process demonstrating the existence of evil and its associated suffering to be a necessary part of the transformative process by which all redeemable humanity is being prepared for future participation in God's Kingdom.

#### INTRODUCTION - REFERENCES:

<sup>A</sup> Augustine – “*The City of God*” Book XXI chapter 12

<sup>B</sup> [Greek and Hebrew interlinear Bible](#)

## Chapter One

### The Hidden Dispensation

*“And **this gospel of the Kingdom** will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations and then the end will come” (Mt24:14 New King James Version)*

The book's title is taken from a passage of Paul which we will examine shortly but it was puzzling over the above statement of Jesus *within its textual context* that was the catalyst to transforming what I had intended to be a small-scale retirement writing project for incorporation into a personal website into something so expansive; so a consideration of the prophecy in which it is embedded is where I have opted to start. The verse which will form the focal point for this opening chapter is taken from what most Bible scholars acknowledge to be a distinctly problematical end-time prophecy referred to as the Olivet Discourse. It was musing upon it that set the ball rolling along a personal voyage of discovery which reshaped my understanding of how biblical prophecy in both the Old Testament and the gospels should be approached. The term “gospel of the Kingdom” occurs only four times in the New Testament and is used exclusively when referring to the preaching of Jesus - twice by Matthew (4:23; 9:35) and once by Mark (1:14). The only other occasion this description of God's glad tidings is used is by Jesus Himself, the verse quoted in the chapter sub-heading. The verse is assumed to be referring to the preaching of the current gospel age, but why is it somewhat incongruously located in the middle of Jesus's discourse on the tribulations, referring to the natural disasters and political traumas that would herald His second coming? Or was the Lord referring here to the destruction of the Temple and the events leading up to it? The disciples had asked Him about both in the Matthew account (v3), but the response doesn't clearly distinguish between these two cataclysmic events, as is also the case in Mark and Luke's accounts. It is as if they were expected to occur almost simultaneously, in which case it must be said these passages would have made a lot more sense. In Mark's account, the flight from Jerusalem to the mountains is directly linked to the tribulations which are to affect the whole of humanity (Mk13:18-20) preceding the coming of the Son of Man (vv24-26). It is clearer still in one of two references to these events in Luke's account (chapter 17), where the escape passage (vv30,31) is indisputably linked to the return of the Son of Man, who “must first be rejected by this generation” (v26). Frankly, neither preterist nor futurist can provide a satisfactory solution to this passage, but once one grasps the implications of the “fellowship pertaining to the administration/dispensation of the secret (plan) that had been hidden in God” (“*fellowship of the secret*” for short), such terms become largely redundant outside the allusive book of Revelation.

A large part of the 24th chapter of Matthew is indisputably referring to the end of the age and the universal significance of the second coming. The passage concerning the escape to the mountains (vv15-20) as is clearer from the account in Luke (21:20) indicates a siege of Jerusalem; yet heading for the hills would hardly have been advisable in the context of the first Jewish-Roman war (66-73AD) as events transpired unless there was to be some divine deliverance waiting when one arrived there. That historical conflict did indeed result in a siege of the city and the destruction of the Temple by members of the Roman army in AD70, but Jesus's advice would align better to the prophecy in Zechariah chapter 14 in which a siege of the holy city by Gentile armies coincides with the coming of JHWE as King of the World. The purpose of escaping to the mountains would indeed have been divine deliverance by passing through the supernaturally created mountain valley to safety in “Azal” (Zech14:5), at which point the Lord would sally out and fight the nations who had oppressed His people (v3) in accordance with other Old Testament end-age prophecy. If Jesus had this in mind, it would explain why the passage in Matthew concerning the escape to the mountains directly leads into

verses 21 and 22 relating an unprecedented global trauma that if it were not to be shortened would destroy humanity, heralding the return of the Son of Man.

Jesus went on to warn of false messiahs, wars, famines, pestilence, earthquakes, persecution of the faithful, many of whom will betray and hate one another, many being ensnared by false prophets; and because of the increase in lawlessness, the love of many of the faithful will grow cold (vv10-12). Comfort should be drawn from the description of the forecast global trauma as birth-pangs (v8), anticipating what Jesus and Matthew refer to as the renaissance or regeneration (Greek: *paliggenesia*) that is to follow. And so we arrive at the featured verse in which Jesus declares that “*this gospel of the Kingdom*” will be proclaimed in every place and nation as a witness before the end of the age comes. For reasons already implied I believe that what was being envisaged here was a global evangelistic mission (cf. Mt10:23b) rather than what we regard as the gospel dispensation, now entering its third millennium. But even if it were referring to the gospel age, for such a universal witness to be accomplished if Christ were to return imminently, three issues would surely need to be addressed: firstly, there should be an agreed understanding of the Good News message to be announced to the world; secondly and inextricably linked to the first, it would be delivered from a unified or at worst affiliated body of churches; and thirdly, the outreach would be driven and given urgency by a common recognition that to use Jesus’s analogy, the fig tree was in bloom (v32), i.e. world events were indicating that the end of the current arrangements on Earth really was nigh. But as some readers will appreciate, for our Lord alludes to it in this prophecy in the context of the Temple as later does Paul in the context of the Church, His return will have been preceded by a cataclysmic ecclesiological event, as a result of which the gospel has a markedly different content depending on which Christian grouping is presenting it, thus making a coherent universal witness quite impossible. If you disagree with that assessment it is probably because you think the other lot, for example Catholic and Orthodox churches if you happen to be an Evangelical, do not know the true gospel anyway; which rather demonstrates my point. Before delving further into that maelstrom some surprising particulars need to be kept in mind with regard to the prophecy under consideration. Starting with one that is explicitly stated in Scripture, the incarnated Son of God was not at that time aware of the precise timetable of events (Mk13:32), for that was known only to His Father. In view of the resurrected Jesus’s unwillingness later to answer His apostles’ inquiry concerning the restoration of the Kingdom to the Jews (Acts1:6-7), they were not given any indication of timescales when writing the epistles, and most would agree that is evident from the tone of their content. For example, although Paul on one occasion refers to himself as being absent from the body and present with the Lord, i.e. going to Heaven when he dies, he always encourages or warns his readers in the churches in terms of being prepared for the “Day of the Lord” (1Cor1:8; 5:5 2Cor1:14, Phil1:6,10;2:16, 1Thes5:2; 2Thes2:2; 2Pet3:10,12); or “patiently to await the Son from Heaven” (1Thes1:10), rather than speaking in terms of an individual’s death and the judgement to follow it. It suggests that he along with the apostles had themselves interpreted the Lord’s teaching as indicating such a day might well arrive within a generation, albeit that St Peter suitably reminded his readers that one day with the Lord can be as a thousand years (2Pet3:8).

### **Restoration of the Kingdom to Israel**

But the more salient issue to consider at this point is what exactly the apostles were asking Jesus in Acts1:6-7 and what He said in response, and what is equally interesting what He did not say. “*Lord, will you at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?*” The enquiry pertained to the re-instatement of the Kingdom role to its intended heirs the Jewish nation, and by implication the related prophecies concerning the physical nation itself. The question obviously cannot relate to Jewish people “getting saved by coming into the Church”, for the Church’s membership at that point was almost exclusively Jewish and continued to be so up to Peter’s revelation concerning the admittance of the Gentiles (Acts10). Jesus in response does not dismiss the apostles’ inquiry as irrelevant on a basis that the Kingdom was to be established universally through the Church, but rather He replies that it was not their business “*to know the times and seasons which the Father has put under His own authority*”. Given the timing (post-Commission) and the persons being denied enlightenment on the subject Jesus did not intend it to be the Church’s immediate business either. The response also implied that such a

re-instatement might indeed be anticipated otherwise He surely would have replied along the lines: “You have not understood my teaching; the question is irrelevant”. In terms of Old Testament prophecies relating to what we know as the gospel age, as most readers will recognize, there simply aren’t any that come close to envisaging the form it has taken. Without exception they roll together the coming of the Messiah as heralded by John the Baptist with final judgement and messianic rule, as indeed did the Baptist in his understanding and preaching as I will demonstrate shortly. Jesus’s reference to *this* gospel of the Kingdom (*touto to euaggelion* Mt24:14) that He envisaged would be preached before His return must equate to the Good News message about the coming Kingdom and how to prepare for it that Jesus and His disciples had been preaching to the Jewish people, for it was *this* gospel not another (I said I was pedantic), and a major component of the outreach was physical healing, raising the dead and casting out evil spirits. That was the context of His commission: “*Freely you have received, freely give*” (Mt10:8). For all twelve including Judas Iscariot had been given the power to heal sickness and disease (v1). Yet what Jesus’s disciples were preaching and performing (albeit exclusively amongst the Jews v5) as a result of their Matthew 10 commission could have contained no reference to Jesus’s death and resurrection and the soteriology focussed around it, for the disciples had no conception of it (Lk9:45, 18:31-34); yet it would be “this gospel of the Kingdom” that the Lord envisaged would be a witness to the rest of the world at the end of the age (Mt24:14).

Already, two seminal points may be gleaned: firstly and more generally, scriptural references to “the gospel”, for example Paul’s introductory statement in his letter to the Romans (1:1-7) are referring to a proclamation concerning the Lordship or Kingship of Jesus; the gospel *per se* is not a list of instructions about how one gets saved; rather that is the result for those who obey the Good News proclamation. Secondly and more controversially, Jesus’s understanding of the “gospel of the Kingdom” as a final witness to the world re-affirms that at the time of the Olivet discourse He was not anticipating (or if you prefer not disclosing) the gospel age of the Church as it has panned out. That is why the Church has never preached the “gospel of the Kingdom” that Jesus’s disciples were preaching and enacting, in which physical healing and satanic deliverance were central and the soteriology concerning Christ’s Passion quite absent. The gospel the Church *has* been preaching has rightly been focussed on Christ’s death and resurrection as the means by which the soul can be healed, the elect of God sanctified, and the world enlightened and salted. Of course, Jesus hadn’t died and been resurrected at the time of the Olivet Discourse, but the point that I am typically labouring is that no reference could have been made about His death and its implications for none of the disciples were expecting it let alone would understand it (Lk9:45; 18:31-34).

### **“Behold the Servant of God who is to eradicate sin from the world”**

At least two of John Baptist’s former disciples were amongst the twelve so they could not have been aware of it either in spite of the prophet’s references to the “*talya d’alaha*”, which John translates in his gospel as “Lamb of God” for that is what the apostle had come to know Christ to be: the Paschal Lamb. But “*talya*” can equally mean “servant” (or “son”) in the Aramaic language, and one of those is bound to have been the Baptist’s understanding otherwise his disciples that became the Christ’s disciples would surely have been better informed and prepared for what was to occur (i.e. their Lord’s death). It is highly unlikely that Jesus was referred to as the “Lamb of God” by His disciples during His earthly ministry, which is why it is only to be found in the later Johannine account. For the slaying of the lamb was the focal rite of Jewish Passover, and as His most faithful disciple had assured his Master: “No worries, Lord, that is certainly not going to be happening to You!” (cf. Mt16:22).

### **Acts: a guide to sound evangelism**

Once one reaches the Acts of the Apostles, the crucified and risen Jesus is central to the Good News message. Indeed, Acts is vital in that it indicates how people were called to gospel salvation in terms of what is required of them and once again just as importantly what is not. Examine every sermon in Acts meticulously, including Paul’s and you will note that “justification” for example is mentioned but once (13:38b/39). In the apostolic evangelistic preaching of Acts, people were not brought to



salvation by apprehending “justification by faith alone”, or by “renouncing any effort to be righteous and resting in the Saviour’s merits” or “looking to the finished work of Christ and appropriating it to myself” or “believing that Jesus had died *for me* as an individual” or “praying the prayer of faith, asking Jesus to come into my heart” but simply by acknowledging and believing that Jesus Christ is Lord, turning from their sinful ways and being baptized for cleansing of past sin: nothing more, nothing less (cf. Acts 8:36,37 & 17:30). The teaching on how the Christian goes on to grow in the faith and in holiness and participate fully in the life of the Church is provided by the epistles. Of course, none of the apostles’ writings are specifically evangelistic, being pastoral letters written to the churches, but even allowing for this change of genre (evangelistic preaching to pastoral letter) it cannot be the case that what is essential to saving faith could be excluded from *all* the evangelistic sermons in the Bible and can only be deduced from the Pauline epistles! Of course, the Lord’s ethical teaching in the gospels along with the pastoral epistles must be drawn upon to fill out the picture of what it means to commit one’s life to Christ; but in terms of what one is required to believe or emotionally experience to become a Christian, and who within the broader Church are to be regarded as such, nothing can supplement the requirements of initiation as preached in Acts. Likewise, if the gospel as one currently perceives it does not match the heralding angel’s description of “*Good News of great joy that shall be to all people* (Lk 2:10), be assured one has not yet fully grasped the implications of the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ. Angelic messages of Good News and great universal joy lead to joyous outcomes for humanity, albeit not necessarily for each individual; any eschatological depiction that does not reflect that Good News requires revisiting, however revered its formulator may have been.

### **Saul of Tarsus - The thirteenth faithful apostle**

Jesus had called twelve men to the apostolate for good reason, and a richly symbolic one:

*And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you who have followed Me, in the Regeneration when the Son of Man will sit down on His glorious throne, you also shall **sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel** (Mt 19:28 New American Standard Bible)*

It symbolized the reconstitution of God’s chosen people: the twelve tribes, only two of which had survived at this point. Judas lost his spot and was replaced by Matthias who it tends to be forgotten was added to the eleven faithful apostles (Acts 1:26), surely to complete the symbolism for there was no obvious practical reason for him be recruited at that point. Peter had insisted that one from amongst the larger group of men and women who had been accompanying Jesus throughout His ministry be appointed to make up the twelve who were to witness to Jesus’s life, death and resurrection as apostles (Acts 1:21,22). Saul of Tarsus on the other hand was appointed “out of due time” (1 Cor 15:8), personally commissioned by the risen and ascended Christ as the thirteenth faithful apostle<sup>1</sup> now that gospel salvation was to be made available to the Gentile nations. In his own words, Saul of Tarsus was “*chosen to know God’s will; to see the Righteous One and hear His voice so as to be a witness to all men*” (Acts 22:14,15). Yet surely if Jesus had initially envisaged commissioning a universal body to take over the role of Israel in establishing God’s Kingdom on Earth, He would not have ruined the symbolism by appointing a thirteenth apostle at a later stage specifically to target the Gentiles (Rom 11:13). That is hardly a strong argument in itself to justify the title of this opening chapter, just one piece of the evidence. For it should become obvious as one carefully reads through Acts that in spite of the Great Commission to baptize and make disciples of all nations, it is not until events recorded in the eleventh chapter that any of the disciples fully grasped that anyone who was not a Jew, Samaritan or proselyte could be granted the same gift of salvation [Greek: *ten isen dorian*] as that intended for the Jews:

*I (Peter) realized **then** that God was giving them (the Gentiles) the **identical gift** He gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; and who was I to stand in God’s way? This account satisfied them (circumcised believers in Jerusalem) and they gave glory to God, saying “God has clearly granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that **leads to life** (Acts 11:17,18 New Jerusalem Bible).*

One will constantly need to keep in mind that references to “eternal life” or “life” in the New Testament relate to being united to God in Christ now, not “going to Heaven when you die”:

*And **this** is eternal life, that they might know You the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (Jn17:3).*

*And: "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood **has** (present tense) eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn6:54)*

*And: "No murderer has eternal life **abiding in him**" (1Jn3:15)*

St John is referring to something to be experienced now; a higher form and quality of life than that which we can naturally know as fallen human beings; likewise, Peter in Acts. Even the sinless Saviour asserted that He “**lived by the Father**” (Jn6:57) in the same way “*those who eat Me shall **live by Me*** (same verse), affirming again that “life” as Jesus, Paul and others speak of it does not refer to “avoiding perdition” or going to Heaven but a present empowering relationship with the divine; “death” being the deprivation of such. This is not to deny that eternal life in the more literal sense is promised for the future; i.e. living in a body that never ages or dies rather than this body which is heading for the grave. Those who have eternal life abiding in them also hope to inherit such everlasting life (e.g. Tit3:7).

### **Why the Pope is not Jewish**

The chief apostle will have been aware he had received a universal commission to make disciples for Jesus of all nations. But Acts 11:17 confirms categorically he had not up to that point understood that Gentiles were to receive a gift of salvation of the nature that he and his fellow Jews had received; i.e. that which pertained to “eternal life” as we have just defined it. Peter and the other apostles would therefore not have envisaged that those who were to carry the work of the Kingdom forward after them could be Gentile since they had not grasped that non-Jews were to benefit in the same way as they had from the “Good News” of Jesus. This should appear all the more surprising considering that the disciples had spent further time with Jesus after His resurrection receiving instruction from Scripture concerning Himself (Lk24:45,46); surprising that is until one apprehends the “fellowship of the secret/mystery”. Peter’s realization concerning the Gentiles’ inheritance came through his vision of the sheet of unclean animals that he was told to kill and eat (Acts 11:1-18) prior to his involvement in the first recorded conversion of a Gentile named Cornelius. Again, does not this surprise you? This man who had spent three years at the Saviour’s side and been subsequently filled with the Spirit yet did not realize the Gentiles were to be incorporated into the Church – they were barely to be associated with (Acts 10:28); unless of course Jesus had not taught otherwise and this would be Paul’s Good News (cf. Rom 16:25). In Peter’s case he did not grasp the matter until he had received a prophetic vision; in view of the nature and timing of Paul’s commission he was in no doubt he had been called to evangelize the (uncircumcised) Gentile nations and regarded Peter as leading the evangelisation of the “circumcision” (Gal 2:7,8). Some would make the case that particularly in view of his contribution to the Scriptures, Paul was the supreme apostle rather than Peter and I am inclined to agree with them. Yet paradoxically it re-affirms Peter to be the rock (Greek: *Petros*) upon which Jesus would build His assembly, for as we have just been considering the Lord had originally called twelve apostles, not thirteen. Paul affirmed Peter to be the leader of those apostles evangelising the Jews, yet Jesus had given no indication whatsoever that such would be the arrangement when He commissioned Peter and (at that point) ten other disciples. Paul also had to rebuke fallible Peter for his reluctance to fellowship with Gentile Christians (Gal 2:11-14). Not so surprising really since the one apostle had been instructed by the incarnate Word of God as Jewish Reformer (cf. Mt 23:1-3), the other by that same divinity as Overseer of His international Church; the one apostle being ignorant of the fellowship of the mystery that had been hidden in the Father (Eph 3:9), the other being its discloser having been personally instructed by the Son (cf. Gal 1:16, 17). Do not give up on me, all shall be explained within the chapter: my frequent prayerful and not intentionally irreverent refrain throughout my encounter with the Spirit was “You’ve got to be kidding me”.

Prophetic passages in the Old Testament that appear to be anticipating the Church age need to be examined in context. Probably the one that comes closest is Joel chapter 2, and the section we relate to the Church is:

*You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel; I am the Lord your God and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame. And it shall come to pass that **afterwards** I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men shall see visions, and also on my menservants and on my maidservants I shall pour out my Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the Heavens and in the Earth, blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall turn sun into darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord and it shall come to pass that **whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved**, for in Mt Zion and Jerusalem there shall be deliverance as the Lord has said among the remnant whom the Lord calls (Jl2:27-32 New King James Version – listed as 3:1-5 some versions)*

Joel's prophecy appears to be depicting a period that will immediately *follow* the restoration of Israel and the vindication of His people in the presence of JHWE, which is the case in all such prophecy. Order or sequence is a quandary for the Old Testament spiritualizing hyper-allegorist; i.e. much of Christendom at present. I am aware that Christians of my former ilk will not be comfortable with that term, but I simply mean it in the dictionary sense of "all Christians everywhere"; likewise with "Jewry", I am referring to all Jewish people, their culture and beliefs. Whilst there are of course frequent allegorical references to Christ and the gospel throughout the Old Testament, there is also a historical context and narrative to be considered, such as the fact that Torah was both practiced and delighted in by the godly (Ps119). Similarly with prophecy, Joel and those who interpreted him understood the promised restoration of Israel in a more literal sense, ending His nation's humiliation, the oppressing "Northerners" being sent packing (Jl2:20); God's people and even the animal Kingdom liberated (Jl2:22) within a restored religious, political and ecological environment (Jl2:23). This would be followed by an outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh in turn followed by the tribulation (Jl2:30,31) and the Day of JHWE. The gospel of the Kingdom would be preached, echoing Jesus's words: "*Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Lk24:47)*" Those calling on the name of the Lord and fleeing to the Mountains would "escape" whilst the "remnant" would be safe in Jerusalem (Jl2:32). For sure, Peter draws upon the above passage from Joel in the context of the Spirit's outpouring on the Day celebrating the Feast of the first-fruits (Pentecost) (Acts2:17:21), so the first part of the prophecy had been fulfilled in the context of the apostolic gospel age. Prophets in the apostolic era were relatively commonplace (Acts13:1; 15:32; 21:10), but although Paul confirms their ecclesiological office as secondary only to the apostles (1Cor12:28) they have played no universally accepted office in the Apostolic Church beyond the first century; similarly, miracle workers and healers. Yet Jesus had said "*If I cast out devils by the finger of God then the Kingdom of God has come upon you*" and implied in Jn14:12 that His followers would likewise be given authority to raise the dead, physically heal and cast out demons, indeed do greater works than He had performed; yet again, that is only really the case during the apostolic era. I have concluded that these miraculous events along with the prophetic office were a continuation of the witness of Jesus and His disciples during His time on Earth and were for the same purpose: as a witness *to God's chosen race* that the Kingdom of God had come upon them; and since all the miraculous activity was carried out in Jesus's name, evidence that the One that their leaders had conspired to crucify was indeed the promised Messiah.

### **The Jews' two-stage rejection of Jesus and His Kingdom**

Here is one of several points where confusion has arisen with regard to the implications of the rejection of Jesus as Messiah by His people in terms of the apparent subversion of Old Testament prophecy. The first rejection/subversion is recognized by Christendom but not Jewry whilst the second has been understood by neither, being the fellowship of the secret; initial incredulity for Christendom, potential Good News for Jewry and great news for the world. I will endeavour to unpack what I mean by that statement during the remainder of this chapter.

The key reference to the first rejection or failure to recognize Israel's "day of visitation" together with its implications is outlined by Luke. Jesus approaches the holy city on a donkey and weeps over her:

*"If you had known, even you, especially in this your day the things that **make for your peace!** But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you and your children with you, to the ground, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, **because you did not know the time of your visitation**" (Lk19:42-44 New King James Version)*

It must be remembered that many ordinary Jews welcomed Jesus to their city with their palm leaves but their leaders were indignant and already plotting His downfall. This was the first rejection culminating in the crucifixion and as Jesus stated (v42) it put paid to the prophecies indicating that the coming of the Messiah would bring an end to Israel's political and military problems; the promise of peace and security for Jerusalem, evident in much prophecy including the recent angelic annunciations concerning John and Jesus, would not be secured by Jesus in His earthly lifetime, quite the contrary in fact; worse was to come for Israel in about a generation's time. Jesus warned as much in the Olivet discourse we have been considering. But this *per se* is not what resulted in the rejection of the Jewish nation as sole inheritors of the Kingdom that Paul refers to in Romans 11 and Ephesians 3. Such is affirmed in Acts where the apostle indicates that even after Pentecost it was *still* the Jewish people's "day of visitation" and they were still not appreciating it. Paul gave this warning to certain Jews at Antioch:

*So be careful! – or what the prophets say will happen to you: "Cast your eyes around you mockers; be amazed and perish! For I am doing something in your own days that you would never believe if you were told of it" (Acts13:40,41 New Jerusalem Bible)*

Note the warning is about what will or might happen to the Jewish nation, not what already had happened. Their day of visitation did not end when they crucified Christ: that event that Jesus referred to as His other baptism had been both divinely planned and prophesied (Acts2:23; Is53:5); what was shortly to occur was undoubtedly planned or foreknown (by God) but never prophesied; it concerns the secret fellowship (or community partnership) "hidden in God" even from earlier prophets; it concerned a universal Church. For the Jewish leaders refused to acknowledge that the resurrection and the miraculous signs were the vindication of Jesus's earlier claims. They still rejected His Messiahship even now that He had been raised to the highest Heavens and empowered His disciples to work miracles in His name. That, in modern parlance is where they finally blew it. They had already blown the prospect of political peace and security through their rejection of Jesus in His lifetime, now something even more radical was at stake: Kingdom inheritance. The very next Sabbath, these same leaders "filled with jealousy" towards the apostles, just as they had been toward Jesus used blasphemies to contradict everything Paul said (v45), which prompted the apostle to add this:

*We had to proclaim the word of God to you (Jews) first, but since you have rejected it, (i.e. the apostle's message) since you do not think yourselves **worthy of eternal life**, here and now we turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord commanded us to do when He said "I have made you (Israel) a light to the nations, so that my salvation may reach the remotest parts of the world" (Acts13:46,47).*

The prophecy from which Paul quotes (Is49) declares Israel to be God's servant, through whom He would manifest His glory (v3) and by whom He would bring saving enlightenment to the whole world (v6). They as His chosen people and future heirs of the world (cf. Rom4:13,14) would have come to know "eternal life", i.e. an intimate relationship with God and life of an eternal quality (Jn17:3) through sanctification in Christ blood (Zech13:1); but as the same prophet foretold this had been prophetically linked with the restoration and liberation of their nation and holy city through the direct intervention of a returning messiah, who as well as residing with his people would act as judge and arbitrator with opposing nations (Is2:4; Mic4:3.) Now, says Paul, as a result of their rejection, the universal enlightenment would go ahead without them by means of a newly formed universal assembly founded by their Messiah and His apostles, none of whom had been drawn from the ranks of the Jewish sacral hierarchy. Although it is only briefly alluded to in Scripture, the longed-for national liberation and the re-instatement of Israel to "the Kingdom" would now have to wait (Acts1:6). After issuing this warning, Paul and Barnabas symbolically shook the dust from off their feet as they left

Antioch (13:51), just as the disciples had done to towns and homes that rejected the “gospel of the Kingdom” preached during Christ’s earthly ministry. Shortly afterwards at Corinth, preaching as usual in the synagogue, certain Jews “turned against (Paul) and started to insult him”. Paul took his cloak and shook it out in front of them, saying:

*“Your blood be on your own heads; from now on I will go to the Gentiles **with a clear conscience**”*  
(Acts 18:6 New Jerusalem Bible).

One is bound to ask why Paul’s conscience would not have been clear (literally: clean) if he had brought this gospel to the Gentiles and the Jews hadn’t rejected his message: wasn’t his message of salvation intended for all? Well, yes and no: “*for as a result of the Jews’ rejection, salvation has come to the Gentiles to provoke them to jealousy*” (cf. Rom 11:11). I had previously understood this to be merely a question of order, but there would be no logical reason for such if the privileges of Kingdom service and the eternal life pertaining to it were from the time of Pentecost being offered to the world; apart from which the apostles would have been quite clear in their minds about the matter, which they certainly were not, with the obvious exception of the lately-commissioned Saul of Tarsus. Apart from which, Paul writing to the Romans is adamant: salvation came to the Gentiles as a result of the Jews’ rejection; it was not a question of protocol or order. For as we will see there is salvation and there is SALVATION. The latter was earmarked for the Jews alone in Old Testament prophecy but was to be made available to the nations through Paul’s revelation of what in short-hand I refer to as “the fellowship of the secret”. “Salvation” as foretold for the Gentile nations meant one would be enlightened, pardoned in the name of Jesus if one acknowledged Him as Lord, leading to acceptance as a subject in God’s Kingdom, for all who call on the name of the Lord would be spared (i.e. saved from perdition). SALVATION on the other hand was to be born again by water and Spirit, delivered from corruption by means of sanctification in the blood appointed for sprinkling<sup>2</sup> provided through Calvary (Heb 12:24 cf. Greek) resulting in interior communion with Christ, eternal life, participation in God’s royal priesthood and a joint-inheritance with the Son of God, no-less.

In the early chapters of Acts, everything appeared to be following prophetic expectations: the Messiah had come, been rejected, executed, raised and ascended. For sure, few if any Jews, even the twelve, had understood His death from Scripture but it could be seen and understood in retrospect, for all references to the gospel being “demonstrated from Scripture”, for example to the Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot exclusively utilized the Old Testament at that point. The Spirit had been poured out upon Jews and proselytes on Pentecost, the dead were being raised; demons expelled, numerous miracles being performed, not just by apostles but deacons as well (Acts 6:8). Even items of the apostles’ clothing or handkerchiefs were taken to people and they were healed. Multitudes came to the apostles for healing, and again, all were healed (Acts 5:16). The Good News about Jesus was being preached as a result of which Jews, Samaritans and proselytes were receiving the gift of the Spirit leading to “eternal life”, such that at that point Peter could say:

*All the prophets that have ever spoken from Samuel onwards have predicted these days* (Acts 3:24).

But they did not predict what was about to follow, and that had been heralded by the appointment of the thirteenth faithful apostle – O blessed number, for it signified that Gentiles, against all prophetic predictions were to be granted “eternal life” and have equal status with elect Jews as joint-heirs with Christ in His Kingdom. Paul had been appointed “*as a priest in the Good News of God that the offering up of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 15:16 Young’s Literal). Having quoted from Joel concerning the pouring out of the Spirit, the apostle Peter goes on to tell his Jewish hearers that the Jesus they had crucified was resurrected and temporarily being retained by Heaven until coming again to establish a universal restoration (Acts 3:21). In the meantime, they should repent, be baptized for the forgiveness of sins and thus receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

So in terms of the Joel’s prophecy, the outpouring of the Spirit had been fulfilled, but the part that the prophet thought would precede it concerning the Jewish nation and people had not. The fact that Peter nevertheless draws upon this prophecy in the context of the dawning of the gospel age actually reinforces what is being asserted here – that the terrestrial promises pertaining to the Jews and Jerusalem are not fulfilled or “re-envisioned” through the establishment of the Church, and so the

apostle utilizes virtually the only passage that appears to resemble a gospel age rather than apply the imagery of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel being replaced by the Church, albeit that Paul does on one occasion refer to the “Jerusalem that is above”, our Mother (Gal4:26), referring to those who dwell in Heaven and form a part of the communion of saints with the Church on Earth (see also Heb12:22). Wherever Old Testament prophecy is quoted in the New Testament, it is not re-envisaged to fit the idea of the Church; rather selective portions pertaining to the particulars that have been fulfilled are quoted, and the rest, such as the restoration of Israel, destruction of the wicked and arbitration with the nations is omitted. Such scriptural dark matter incorporating some of the more cryptic or ambiguous narratives which occur in this analysis are an aspect of what is considered in more detail in chapter five under “progressive revelation”. This has undoubtedly been God’s stratagem for the Church, just as it has been for the world in terms of the human race’s pursuit of scientific knowledge and their advances in medicine, transport and communicative media. For it would hardly have been fitting for television, mobile phones and the internet to have been available for the events surrounding the first coming of Jesus Christ; nor for that matter the printing press, given that Jesus would be founding a Church, not writing a book. In the religious sphere an on-going learning curve has been guaranteed through the intentionally cryptic profundity of Holy Scripture that was never intended to be unravelled until the end of the age, for it contains at least one significant mystery (or secret) that was not to be disclosed until such a time (cf. Dan12:1-4&7; Rev10:4,7). But now let us focus more carefully on that other “*musterion*”, usually translated “mystery” which in its context pertains rather to a divine secret requiring initiation.

### **The fellowship of the secret**

The New Testament “elephant in the room”: the biblically unexplained and largely undebated non-fulfilment (or subversion) of scriptural prophecy regarding the terrestrial and political aspects of the Jewish apocalypse pertains to a secret disclosure, revealed to and through Paul of which I was previously unaware but now realize is the key to understanding Old Testament prophecy. Still more importantly from a Christian perspective, it reveals the true significance and *context* of “gospel salvation”. It also sheds light on the nature of the processes that will be initiated by Jesus at His coming. Addressing Gentile converts in the Ephesus Church, the apostle wrote as follows:

*Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you (Gentiles), 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 people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His 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 (Eph3:2-6 New International Version). [\* i.e. the prophets contemporary with the apostles – NOT the prophets of the Old Testament]*

So the Church was not to be exclusively Jewish: what’s the big deal some might ask? Three times in this short passage the apostle refers to a mystery (or secret): who is likely to pay much attention to such a seemingly verbose passage? Who indeed; that is why its implications have been missed for nearly two millennia. I have come to appreciate during this process that neither Paul nor any other contributor to Holy Scripture ever “waffles” or is slipshod with his use of words. Every phrase and grammatical construction in the original Greek or Hebrew has been incorporated and preserved for a purpose; the Holy Spirit as Supreme Editor has seen to it, though translators have not always respected it. The point about this passage is not the mystery itself relating to the Gentiles inheriting the Kingdom, but the fact that it *was* a mystery; in fact, a secret [same word in Greek], into which the apostle to the Gentiles had been initiated through personal revelation. It was “*not made known to people in other generations*”, even by the prophets, otherwise it would not be a secret but a fulfilment; nor indeed was it revealed by or possibly to the divine Prophet in the gospels (cf. Mk13:32), at least not at the time He was outlining His expectations regarding His second coming and/or temple destruction that we looked at earlier. For this was a secret to be revealed by Paul that had been previously “hushed up” (*sesigemenou* - Rom16:25 Greek interlinear), the significance of which has

scarcely been grasped in the gospel age either. This was *Paul's gospel (to euaggelion mou - Rom16:25)*; the revelation of the mystery kept secret through the ages.

It pertains to a mystery which from Paul and his contemporaries' perspective related to the fact that people outside the race of Israel were not only to be enlightened and offered forgiveness through repentance in the name of the Lord as indicated in Old Testament prophecy but come to "*share an inheritance with the sanctified*" (Acts26:18). In Paul's words they were to be "*joint-heirs with Israel*" (v6). They too could receive the Holy Spirit and have their hearts purified by adherence to the faith (Acts15:9 cf. Greek). Be assured that was *not* the teaching of the Old Testament prophets. Such a blessing would be achieved by coming into a mystical communion with Christ:

*The mystery which has been hidden from ages and generations, but **now has been revealed to His saints**, to whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory** (Col1:26,27 New King James Version)*

The mystery being outlined in *this* book is that the Gentiles' access to this supreme gift of grace was indeed initially a mystery, even to the other twelve apostles. All this has implications to the interpretation of earlier prophecy: logically one would expect the promises of the Old Testament to be fulfilled in the New Testament age, albeit perhaps in a more spiritualized sense. But such a fulfilment isn't going to happen; it is not intended to happen – at least not all within the current age for earlier prophecies did not envisage the current age as such. From any human perspective, the published plan for the salvation of the world has been changed; not the Man or His supreme act of love at the centre of it of course but the supporting cast. Yet according to Paul, it was not really a change of plan: the Old Testament prophecies set out what would happen if the Jews recognized their "day of visitation" when it arrived in the Person of Jesus. The Father knew the outcome but did not relay it through His prophets; it was kept a closely guarded divine secret, to be revealed (appropriately) by the thirteenth faithful apostle, appointed out of time for an unexpected task. This may appear bizarre, even playful, but then this is our God: "*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out. For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been His counsellor?*" Thus exclaimed Paul, also in the context of the Gentiles' unexpected inheritance of "eternal life", as he outlines it again in Romans chapter eleven. Yet even this more explicit reference hasn't been grasped either; subconsciously readers suspect the poor old chap's throwing another wobbly, or at least he cannot possibly mean what he appears to be writing (especially Rom11 vv11,12,15 &30). On the contrary, the apostle meant exactly what he had written: Gentiles would not have been "saved" in the present age if the Jews had kept Covenant. They could have been enlightened and finally accepted into God's eternal Kingdom, but they would not have been saved in gospel terms, i.e. their souls whilst still embodied could not have been healed, restored and divinely aided so as to experience eternal life by *recovering the divine communion* that was lost as a result of the Fall. This mystery hasn't been grasped because something else hasn't been grasped along with it, without an understanding of which the apostle's comments about the Gentile inheritance taken as read would indeed appear ludicrous, for the Old Testament makes it quite clear that God had intended to reconcile the world not just the Jews to Himself. That "other" pertains to what has already been hinted at and is to be considered in detail in the chapter concerning justification through the faithfulness of Christ; how the benefits of the Atonement avail at two levels. All then will make better sense: "But is it scriptural?" I hear you cry; I intend to demonstrate so shortly.

### **Non-retractable assurances to the Jewish nation**

*Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance (Ps33:12)*

The psalmist was referring to the nation of Israel, the first-fruits of God's increase (Jer2:3) and the intended "sons of the Kingdom" who later were rejected or rather, placed on hold (Mt8:12). For what may humanly speaking appear to be a change of plan is not a change of mind with respect to the promises JHWE has made to His covenant people, or else our faith might be in jeopardy. The apostle writes in the same chapter of Romans (11): "*there is no change of mind on God's part about the gifts*

*He has made, or of His choice* (v29). That refers to His choice of the nation of Israel as His special people and that her King would one day become King of the world. That plan has not so much been re-envisioned, spiritualized or even “fulfilled in the person of Jesus”; rather it has been re-ordered, subdivided and augmented; for God has concluded Gentile and Jew in unbelief that He might have mercy on both (Rom11:32) and give eternal life to both (Acts11:17) through joint incorporation within the Fellowship of His Son. The outcome is now going to be even better; for Jewish disobedience has brought about the opportunity for an alien like myself to be fully reconciled to God now, even whilst in sin-prone flesh. But His first-choice people have not been forgotten either:

*For if the casting away of (the Jews) be reconciliation for the World, what shall the reception of them be but life from the dead? (Rom11:15)*

This affirms what I was indicating earlier; it was not a question of protocol or order, i.e. preach the gospel to the Jews first then move on to the Gentiles – it was the Jew’s “casting away” that led to the Gentiles salvific inheritance as co-equals with His chosen race. It had rather been a case of “offer the privileges of the Kingdom to the sole heirs-apparent first; if they as a nation reject it (i.e. they still reject its King Jesus) then let it be offered to the whole world to rouse the holy nation to jealousy” (cp. Rom11:11). This is surely reaffirmed just a few verses later when Paul refers to his Gentile Christian readers as wild and unnatural appendages that had been grafted into the good olive tree that was the Jewish nation (Rom11:24). That is hardly the language of prophetic fulfilment; the Gentile nations were never perceived in prophecy to be joint-heirs-apparent to the Kingdom. It subverted all expectation; it was *new revelation*; it was the fellowship of the secret hidden in God, the immediate text surrounding which we shall come to in a moment. And it is wonderful news, for grasping this mystery opens up a new perspective on the context of gospel salvation within a vastly broader salvific landscape, as hinted at a few paragraphs ago. But where does this leave us within the re-staged procession of salvation history; at what point are we within such a metanarrative? According to the Old Testament the age in which we are living was to be the time when the Gentile nations were being enlightened by God’s Holy priesthood the Jewish nation under their Messiah King of Israel and the World; but instead, elect members from all nations are currently joining that royal priesthood through incorporation into the Church to enlighten the whole world and prepare it for realization of the Kingdom of God at Christ’s appearing.

### **The Jewish Nation: light to the Gentiles**

As far as the Old Testament age was concerned, the race of Israel was intended to have been a light to the Gentile nations, living as a holy nation faithful to JHWE, whose Name and Law would become honoured amongst other nations:

*Look, as JHWE my God commanded me (Moses), I have taught you laws and customs for you to observe in the country in which you are to take possession. Keep them and put them into practice and other peoples will admire your wisdom and prudence. Once they know what all these laws are, they will exclaim “No other people is as wise and prudent as this great nation Israel (Deut4:5,6).*

Some readers will be aghast at Moses’ statement - the Law (Torah) actually to be practiced so that the world would come to admire Israel *and her Law*? Yes indeed, that was the divine intention – so that the Jewish race might fulfil its role of light to the Gentiles; a thoroughly positive role for the Law which clearly Moses understood but the likes of Augustine, Luther and Calvin did not. The witness of Israel *being faithful to the Law* was meant to have been the rest of the world’s “preparation for the Gospel” i.e. their future submission to the Lordship of King Jesus when He eventually came to do what John Baptist expected Him to do: destroy the enemies and oppressors of God’s people and judge the whole world, i.e. put it to rights. Then, supported by the Jewish Nation (the sons of the Kingdom - Mt8:12), He would establish God’s Kingdom on Earth; reconciling other nations to God and each other by inculcating a way of peace along the lines of Isaiah chapter two that we will look at in a few pages time.

Such was the consistent expectation of all Old Testament prophecy but instead of that, on the minus side the current age remains under the grip of evil (cf. Gal1:4) for Satan’s fate has been sealed but he



has not been cast out and continues to deceive the world, whilst very much on the plus side Gentiles are being invited to join with Jews in the Messiah's Fellowship so that together under the direction of the Holy Spirit they may enlighten the unchurched world in preparation for the Lord of the Church's return, "*whom Heaven must keep until the time of the universal restoration*" (Acts3:21 cf. Greek). Then at His coming, supported by a vastly enlarged and racially inclusive sanctified assembly (the sons of God), including those who currently sleep in Christ, He will establish His Kingdom of peace and enlightenment throughout the world. Then what?

*Then comes the end when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when He (the Son) shall have suppressed all rule, authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet...Then when all things have been subdued unto Him, then shall the Son Himself be subject unto Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all (1Cor15:24-28 Young's Literal).*

The Old Testament prophecies had outlined how that would have been accomplished by Jesus with the faithful from His chosen nation; the difference in the "age" (or "Day" or whatever) to come will be the racial make-up of the Jesus people and the folk still needing enlightenment. But the key point is this: the enemies to be defeated or suppressed will be the same, for they will **not** have been eradicated by the Church: Satan, his structures, his seed (Gen3:15), his sicknesses (Lk13:16) and his death (cf. Heb2:14). The victory over these things has been made possible through the cross but will not be accomplished before the restoration in Christ's presence. The victory over Satan and what he controls on Earth along with the Jewish terrestrial/political expectations of Old Testament prophecy are not being fulfilled or "re-envisaged" in any form within this current dispensation; it has been deferred, effectively to allow for the mystery of the Gentile inheritance to be fulfilled (cf. Rom11:25). The Jewish nation has been provoked to envy; her house has been left to her desolate; yet once the nature and purpose of the current dispensation and the sacred fellowship pertaining to it has been grasped, will she not also say "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*"? (cf. Lk13:35).

### **The fellowship of the secret – unknown to the heavenly sovereignties**

It's about time I focussed on the verse of Scripture which gave rise to the title of this book. Paul refers to the revelation of the Gentiles' unexpected inheritance being provided to the "apostles and prophets" (Eph3:2-6). These refer to prophets of the apostolic age (cf. Acts13:1; 1Cor12:28) for the mystery had only been revealed "now" (v5). Even the heavenly authorities were kept in the dark concerning this mystery, as is confirmed by the often mistranslated and barely comprehended verses 8-11:

*Unto me, who is the most inferior of all the saints, was this grace granted that I should preach among the (Gentile) nations, the unsearchable riches of Christ to enlighten all regarding the fellowship of the secret hidden in God through the ages, who created all things through Jesus Christ, that **through** the Church should **now** be made known **to** the sovereignties and authorities in the heavens, the multi-faceted nature of God's wisdom according to the **purpose of the ages** made in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph3:8-11)*

In other words, it was not until the establishment of the Church, indeed **by** its establishment, that this mystery concerning the Gentiles' portion, salvific inheritance and the nature of the dispensation pertaining to it was revealed by God even to the principalities and powers of Heaven, having been "hidden in God" from the earlier age. That is why none of the Old Testament prophecies depict the gospel age or Church in the form it has taken, for it was never envisaged (or disclosed) that the Gentiles would be included amongst Christ's consecrated band of enlighteners, rather that they would become enlightened through association with the Jews, God's elect people. But now according to Paul's Good News, the Gentiles could themselves be made holy and incorporated within that consecrated fellowship and inherit all its privileges (Acts26:18). As explained in the introduction, having completed this writing I was subsequently led to examine again the writings of the early Fathers and was surprised to discover that St John Chrysostom (AD347-407) had come in part to an understanding of this matter, namely that the dispensation of grace to the Gentiles (resulting in eternal life and a glorious inheritance) was unknown to the Old Testament prophets as well as the celestial

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