

# Born to Win

## Christian Origins #64 - Ephesians

by Ronald L. Dart

There seems to be a difference between a secret and a mystery. At the very least, the Bible seems to use the word “mystery” in more than one sense. For example, there might be something that can be known, but has been deliberately kept secret. In other words, God just didn’t let anybody know it at all—blocked them from it. Then there could be something that is stated—is right there in black and white on the paper—but it’s not understood. It’s a mystery because of *our* limitations and our inability to deal with it. And that’s the only way I can understand what Paul is driving at when he declares that the conversion of the Gentiles was a mystery—that it was (in his words) “not made known to the sons of men”. Here’s what Paul says. It’s found in Ephesians chapter 3, and beginning in verse 1:

### Ephesians 3

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- <sup>1</sup> For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,
- <sup>2</sup> If you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me toward you:
- <sup>3</sup> How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote before in few words,
- <sup>4</sup> By which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)
- <sup>5</sup> 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;

What is this mystery?

### Ephesians 3

AKJV

- <sup>6</sup> That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

Now, that’s clear. The mystery was that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs unto the same body. We don’t need a Gentile church and a Jewish church. There’s going to be *one* church of Jesus Christ, and that’s that.

Now, it’s a mystery to *me* how this could have been a mystery to Paul. I’ll try to explain what I mean. In the last program, I made the point that, in the Old Testament, the stranger—the non-Israelite—could live in Israel as one born in the land. In fact, the Law is *very* emphatic about it and repeats it over and over and over again. It says you shall *love* the strangers, and he shall live among you as one born in the land [**Leviticus 19:34**]. Not only that, the stranger was allowed to offer sacrifices. And the Law specified [**Numbers 15:14**] that, if he comes up to offer a burnt offering, “as *you* do, so shall *he* do.” God didn’t have one way the Gentiles did it, and another way the Israelites did it. They seem every bit to be a part of the same body—that is, of the House of Israel. Now, let me add some more to the mix that I didn’t mention in the last program. There’s a prophecy in Isaiah 42. He says:

**Isaiah 42**

AKJV

<sup>1</sup> Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my elect, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit on him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

Now, here we are *way back* in the Old Testament. Israel is a country with borders and, as far as anyone could tell, they're there worshipping God. They're the only people on the world that worship the true God. They have their Temple, and all these good things. Now he says:

**Isaiah 42**

AKJV

<sup>1</sup> Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my elect, in whom my soul delights; [...]

Who is this servant? He says:

**Isaiah 42**

AKJV

<sup>1</sup> [...] I have put my spirit on him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

In other words, the bringing forth of judgment, or sitting in judgment, is what a *ruler* does, and the implication is that this one is going to be reaching out to the nations—the Gentiles—not just to Israel. And then it says:

**Isaiah 42**

AKJV

<sup>2</sup> He [*that is, this servant*] shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.

He's not a big mouth. He's not a shouter. He's not running up and down the streets making a lot of noise.

**Isaiah 42**

AKJV

<sup>3</sup> A bruised reed shall he not break, [...]

He's not going to be a rough-and-tumble person.

**Isaiah 42**

AKJV

<sup>3</sup> [...] and the smoking flax shall he not quench: [...]

He's not going to change much of the environment that's around him. And it says:

**Isaiah 42**

AKJV

<sup>3</sup> [...] he shall bring forth judgment to truth.

<sup>4</sup> He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: [...]

Not just Israel, in the earth.

**Isaiah 42**

AKJV

<sup>4</sup> [...] and the isles shall wait for his law.

Now, the word “isles” is *commonly* used in this way as a substitute (actually, the Hebrew word [‘iy, יִם, Strong’s H339] means “coastlands”) and is generally used as a substitute for the nations that are kind of outside Israel. Now, how is this to be understood? Well, I don’t know how we would come to it if we didn’t have Matthew, but Matthew makes it about as plain as it can possibly be. He makes it plain that the servant he’s talking about is Jesus. The passage in question is Matthew chapter 12, and verse 9. And here’s what Matthew says:

**Matthew 12**

AKJV

<sup>9</sup> And when he was departed there, he went into their synagogue:

<sup>10</sup> And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

That really wasn’t a genuine question; they just wanted to accuse him of something, because they knew that Jesus had been healing on the Sabbath day.

**Matthew 12**

KJ2000

<sup>11</sup> And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

<sup>12</sup> How much then is a man better than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

<sup>13</sup> Then he said to the man, Stretch forth your hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like the other.

You know, it must have made every hair on everybody’s body stand straight out...except the Pharisees, who:

**Matthew 12**

AKJV

<sup>14</sup> [...] held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

<sup>15</sup> But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from there: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all;

Now, here comes the part that is interesting to us right now.

**Matthew 12**

KJ2000

<sup>16</sup> And charged them that they should not make him known [*Why?*]:

<sup>17</sup> That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying,

<sup>18</sup> Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall show justice to the Gentiles.

<sup>19</sup> He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.

<sup>20</sup> A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he sends forth justice unto victory.

You know, this is interesting because the general presumption of the Messiah was that he would be a *conquering* Messiah. He would come in on a horse, with a sword in his hand, and slay the Romans and free everybody. And yet here is an *Old Testament* prediction of the Messiah that has him being, well, like Jesus—quiet, unassuming, a strong teacher, a healer. And then comes the clincher. In verse 21, Matthew cites the Old Testament as saying this:

### Matthew 12

AKJV

<sup>21</sup> And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

Now, if you're a careful reader, you may conclude that Matthew's playing fast and loose with Isaiah's prophecy. But it's *almost certain* that Matthew is citing a different manuscript of the Old Testament from the Masoretic text. There's a lot we didn't know about the Old Testament in the years gone by. We assumed there was only one tradition of Old Testament manuscripts, and that was the Masoretic text. It's the basis of the Jewish Bible (that is, the Hebrew scriptures) and it's also the basis of most translations of the Old Testament into the English language. But there is a *Greek* translation of the Old Testament—the Septuagint—that was translated from a Hebrew text with some important variations. We know from the Septuagint, which was translated some years before Christ, that there was a different Hebrew text—a different manuscript tradition.

Now, if you're not familiar with this, in the Greek New Testament there are a *number* of manuscript traditions. And it's only by comparing all the different variants of copies, because if you understand how they were made... these things were all copied out by hand, and mistakes got made. And it's only in later years that you can work your way back to the original manuscript by examining the various manuscripts that are available and understanding why this kind of error might be made. You can spot a lot of them because it may be obvious that what a person has done is simply copy one line twice. He got to the end of the line, didn't realize where he was, and when he went back to copy he copied that line over again. Or it could be a line left out because he slipped down a bit. But you'll find other manuscripts that you can use to correct that mistake, and that doesn't become a problem.

Well, in the Old Testament, was never have had that kind of a variety of manuscripts to check against the Masoretic text—which is the standard text of the Old Testament. That is, we didn't until recently. We knew from the Septuagint that there was a different manuscript tradition. When we found the Dead Sea Scrolls, we learned what that tradition might have been. I say *might* have been because, in fact, it's obvious that the Septuagint was not translated from the manuscript tradition that was found at Qumran. So, which version of the Old Testament was Matthew translating or drawing from in making this statement? Because what he has done is take the text from the Masoretic text—which says, “the isles shall wait for his law”, in Isaiah—and *he* has changed it to “in his name shall the Gentiles trust.” And when you understand the Hebrew, you understand the usage of terms, you can *easily* understand how this variation takes place. I won't bore you with the discussion of that right now, except make it very clear: What *Matthew* understood the Old Testament to be saying was that the time was coming that *in the name of God the Gentiles would trust*. Now, this is why I have a little problem with Paul calling it mystery and with suggesting that nobody ever knew this in ages gone by, because it appears Matthew knew it. It appears that Isaiah knew it.

Isaiah often speaks of a person he calls “the servant”, and there's a certain ambiguity in it. Sometimes, he seems to be talking about Jesus; other times even himself; but still in other times (like this place and Isaiah 49) he's obviously talking about *Israel*, the servant of God. And he says:

### Isaiah 49

AKJV

<sup>1</sup> Listen, O isles, [...]

And he seems, in this context, to be using the term “isles” to be talking about the nations—that’s the Gentiles.

### Isaiah 49

AKJV

<sup>1</sup> Listen, O isles, to me; and listen, you people, from far [*Which, again, is a reference to Gentiles.*]; The LORD has called me [*That’s Israel.*] from the womb; from the bowels of my mother has he made mention of my name.

<sup>2</sup> And he has made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand has he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver has he hid me;

<sup>3</sup> And said to me, You are my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

<sup>4</sup> Then I [*That’s Israel, speaking metaphorically.*] said, I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.

<sup>5</sup> And now, said the LORD that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength.

That’s an odd thing, in the way, because always through the prophets we’re talking about Israel being gathered—“Israel this” and “Israel that”. And this time he says, “Well, even though Israel has not gathered yet shall I be glorious.” Why? Then listen to verse 6:

### Isaiah 49

AKJV

<sup>6</sup> And he said, It is a light thing [*It’s a small thing.*] that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel [*No, no. That’s a light thing.*]: I will also give you for a light to the Gentiles, that you may be my salvation to the end of the earth.

The salvation of God is to go *everywhere*, to *all* nations, to the Gentiles. The conversion of the Gentiles, folks, was prophesied *way* back in the Old Testament. Now, there’s a lot more than this, and you can find it. It’s not hard to find, if you’ve got a concordance. Just look up the word “Gentile” or “Gentiles” in the concordance and run them down.

Now, it’s a mystery to me, in the face of all that I read there, that it should be a mystery that the Gentiles are to be part of God’s people. But it was a mystery to the Jews of Paul’s day, anyhow. They had developed a tradition of separation. It was a tradition *so strong* that even Jesus’ apostles were slow in breaking out of it. And as late as the time Ephesians was written, the church was still divided along the lines of Jew and Gentile. This is the only way I can understand what Paul is saying. He says:

### Ephesians 3

KJ2000

<sup>2</sup> If you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me toward you:

<sup>3</sup> How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; [...]

“We’ve got to break out of this mystery which people don’t understand.”

### Ephesians 3

AKJV

<sup>5</sup> Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, [...]

Well, it was written down. They obviously did not understand it.

### **Ephesians 3**

AKJV

<sup>5</sup> [...] as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

<sup>6</sup> That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

And the first four chapters of Ephesians are all about this particular problem: that it was not to be two churches; there was to be *one*—that Jew *and* Gentile were to be together in one body in Christ. Now he goes on to say:

### **Ephesians 3**

AKJV

<sup>7</sup> Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effectual working of his power.

<sup>8</sup> To 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[.]

You know, what Paul is doing here is returning to the promises and the obligations that God had given to Abraham centuries before. There's a short passage in Genesis, chapter 12:

### **Genesis 12**

AKJV

<sup>1</sup> Now the LORD had said to Abram, Get you out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you:

This thing goes all the way back to the very basics of Man's relationship with the descendants of Abraham. He says:

### **Genesis 12**

AKJV

<sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing:

Notice, he said to Abraham, "*You will be* a blessing." Not just that Abraham would *receive* a blessing, but that he would *be* a blessing. How does that work? Well, he says:

### **Genesis 12**

AKJV

<sup>3</sup> And I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you: and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Now, what God is talking out here is an *active* blessing—that Abraham would be an *active* blessing, that his descendants would be an *active* blessing among the people with whom they dwelt. Take, for example, a day a long time ago, when neighbor Abraham was minding his own business up in the plains where he kept his flock, and some marauding bands came down from the north and invaded Sodom and Gomorrah, and took the whole cities and everything in them captive and took a lot of spoil, *and* kidnapped Lot—Abraham's nephew. Well, Abraham saddled up his men and took off after them; caught up with them; defeated these kings thoroughly; and *restored* all the goods, all the wealth,

everything, and all the people—rescued Lot from these people. Abraham *was a blessing* to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, and then he went out and fought their battle and got their stuff back for them.

It's precisely the same thing, in a way, that the United States was a blessing to the people of Kuwait—who, when they were invaded and oppressed by the armies by Baghdad, gathered together a coalition, came in and defeated those armies, and kicked them out. We were *a blessing* to the nation of Kuwait. (Not exactly a blessing to Iraq, but that's a different story, entirely.) So Abraham also was a blessing to Sodom and Gomorrah later on, when God was going down there to see what was going on—to destroy the cities. He actually made an *attempt* to try to save Sodom. And he may have been the last to take this idea very seriously. Israel *failed* to be that blessing, and was ultimately scattered by God.

Even the New Testament church failed initially. The New Testament church sat around Jerusalem for years. I don't know how long it was. It was *years*, though, that they were there. Oh, they were having a wonderful time. They were preaching the gospel. They were breaking bread from house to house. They were really enjoying being Christians. And nobody was going anywhere. Then God caused (or allowed, perhaps I should say) a persecution to come upon the Jerusalem church, and they were scattered to the four winds. And when they went that direction, they took the gospel with them everywhere they went. God says, "I want you to be a blessing to the nations. And you either go, or I'll get you out there one way or the other."

Israel went to exclusivism, and so did many in the early church. And so, at *long last*—after he wasn't able to be successful, it seems, with different people—*finally*, he found him a man who would go. And his name was Saul. You and I know him as Paul. So Paul writes to the Ephesians, and he says:

### **Ephesians 3**

*AKJV*

<sup>8</sup> To 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;

<sup>9</sup> And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

And why?

### **Ephesians 3**

*AKJV*

<sup>10</sup> To the intent that now to the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

Actually, Paul seems to be saying that there are even principalities or powers *in heaven* that are coming to understand what's going on through the work of the church.

### **Ephesians 3**

*AKJV*

<sup>11</sup> According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

Notice, "the *eternal* purpose"; it's *always* been his intent to reach out to the world.

### **Ephesians 3**

*KJ2000*

<sup>12</sup> In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in him.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore I desire that you faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Paul was in jail. He says, “I don’t want you to get too upset by this.”

### **Ephesians 3**

AKJV

<sup>14</sup> For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

<sup>15</sup> Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

Wow. He says, “I bow my knees to the father of Jesus Christ, *of whom* the whole family in heaven”—*family, in heaven*—“and family in earth is named.” We’re *all* named after the Father.

### **Ephesians 3**

AKJV

<sup>16</sup> That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

<sup>17</sup> That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

<sup>18</sup> May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

<sup>19</sup> And to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now Paul turns his attention to unity in the church. But keep in mind that Paul’s approach to unity is: Let’s not throw people *out* to get unity; let’s pull everybody together. Remember what he said in the first chapter? In verse 9, he said, “God”:

### **Ephesians 1**

AKJV

<sup>9</sup> Having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself:

This is what God’s purpose is.

### **Ephesians 1**

AKJV

<sup>10</sup> That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him[.]

He doesn’t want to leave *anybody* out. So the whole idea is, he wants to pull them *all* together—Jew and Gentile—everything together in Christ.

And you also need to remember, as you approach the fourth chapter of Ephesians, that Paul is addressing unity at the *local* level. And as you read it, you should think about all these principles as local principles. Now, I don’t mean by that that you won’t find ideas, principles, thoughts that have broader applications than that. But you’re going to only understand what Paul is driving at accurately, in the sense of the inclusive approach to unity, if you look at the situation on the ground in Ephesus—the people who were reading this letter. Remember, we’re reading *someone else’s mail*, and we need to put ourselves in *their* minds to understand what’s going on. And so, you have a church—a church that’s divided—and the primary focal point of division is between Jew and Gentile.



**Ephesians 4**

AKJV

<sup>1</sup> I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord [*He's in jail.*], beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation with which you are called,

<sup>2</sup> With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love;

And when he says “one another”, he’s not talking about some general, vague sense. He’s talking about one (that is, the Gentile), the other (the Jew)—that you put up with one another.

**Ephesians 4**

AKJV

<sup>3</sup> Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

I think this is *marvelous*. He says “endeavoring”, which means you’re supposed to *work* at this thing. And it’s not just any old unity he’s talking about; he’s talking about the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. You can have a unity that’s imposed by coercion from on high, but that’s not real unity. And it won’t hold indefinitely; it’s too brittle. What he says we’re supposed to do is work—each one of us at the grassroots level—to keep the unity of *the spirit*. And right along with it is the bond of *peace*.

**Ephesians 4**

AKJV

<sup>4</sup> There is one body [*Not two.*], and one Spirit [*Not two.*], even as you are called in one hope of your calling;

There aren’t two hopes. There aren’t two different callings. It’s:

**Ephesians 4**

AKJV

<sup>5</sup> One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

<sup>6</sup> One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

He isn’t dividing himself up, folks, between Jews and Gentiles. Keep in mind what Paul is saying to this church.

**Ephesians 4**

KJ2000

<sup>7</sup> But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

<sup>8</sup> Therefore he says, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

He’s citing an Old Testament scripture [**Psalm 68:18**].

**Ephesians 4**

AKJV

<sup>10</sup> He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.

<sup>11</sup> And he gave [*gifts to people down here,*] some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

What did he do that for?

**Ephesians 4**

AKJV

<sup>12</sup> For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

<sup>13</sup> Till we all [*Jew and Gentile*] come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:

We're supposed to be more like him *every day*. And as we grow more like Christ every day, we grow to understand God's purpose. We grow closer to one another. For it's not possible for us to both be like Christ and to be all that different from one another. "We do this":

**Ephesians 4**

AKJV

<sup>14</sup> That we from now on be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

<sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

Boy, there's a lot of stuff in here. He's talking about people who actually deliberately, with conscious forethought, *lie in wait to deceive*. That's hard to figure. I don't know anybody like that. I know they're there, because Paul said they were at that time, and human nature hasn't changed a bit. But it's *very troubling*, isn't it? It makes it all the more important that a person draws near to God.

**Ephesians 4**

AKJV

<sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

<sup>16</sup> From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love.

*Man*, that's a pregnant sentence. He says the *whole body* does this. *Every joint* supplies something. *Every single person* is making a contribution. And the objective is making increase of this body. What do you mean "this body"? The body of the Ephesian church, composed of Jews and Gentiles, without making *any kind of distinction* between them—that all this makes *increase* of the body, unto the edifying of itself. All of us together in this church work together; each one of us making our contribution to *build it up*—to make it *more* like Christ. I know, we often fail, but at least we know the winning strategy.

Until next time, this is Ronald Dart, and you were *born to win*.

*Christian Educational Ministries*

P.O. Box 560 ❖ Whitehouse, Texas 75791  
Phone: 1-888-BIBLE-44 ❖ Fax: (903) 839-9311  
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