

Introduction to Romans

Romans Series (Part 1)

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Oct 27, 2013

Opening Remarks:

- A. Welcome to this study of history and eschatology from a full preterist perspective.
- B. Last time we finished our study of Paul's resurrection teaching in both of his letters to the Corinthians. We gave a quick overview (the big picture) of the 1 Cor 15 text, and then went through it section by section giving a brief explanation of what Paul was teaching there about the *resurrection* of the dead and the *change* of the living.
- C. In this session, we begin a new series of studies on the book of **Romans**. Some of our regular listeners in the past few months have asked me to do a series on Paul's eschatological teaching in his epistle to the Romans. I have wanted to do that for several years, so this seems to be the right time and place to do it!
- D. Let's ask our Heavenly Father for His blessing on our study together --

Our merciful and gracious Lord, whose forgiveness has no limits, and whose lovingkindness is everlasting: We give all honor and praise and glory to you for choosing us to be your people. We cannot find adequate words to thank you for forgiving us and protecting us and providing for us. We ask for your wisdom and understanding to be poured out in our minds and hearts as we study this letter of your faithful servant Paul to the Jewish and Gentile saints in Rome. May this series of studies refresh our hearts and renew our commitment to offer our lives as willing sacrifices for the advancement of Your Kingdom on earth for all generations to come, just like Apostle Paul did. This we pray in the Name of Your Son and our Redeemer, Jesus. Amen.

Introduction

The Universalist Max King and some of his Collective Body followers have suggested that *Romans* contains a lengthy encoded message about the Collective Body being covenantally raised out of dead Judaism into the life of the New Covenant Kingdom. However, after we get into this study of Romans, we will see that this is not the case at all, and why that approach is very misleading and confusing.

Paul did NOT write this book as an encrypted message about a collective body resurrection process, which only preterists in the twentieth century could finally decode. He wrote it to real live Christians in the city of Rome, addressing some very real concerns that he had for them. There are no complex hidden meanings embedded in the text here. Paul's message was meant to be easily understood by those first century saints in Rome, and we will see that very clearly once we get into the study of the text.

Before studying any part of Scripture, I have always found it helpful to spend some time up front getting to know the **author** of the book, his intended **audience**, and the historical **circumstances** around which it was written. That procedure has served me well in my efforts to understand Scripture.

There are five key questions that I have found extremely helpful to ask and answer before analyzing any biblical text. This is like sharpening the ax before chopping down the tree. We want our axes to be as sharp as possible before we start chopping. Jewish fathers teach their children to ask good questions every day in school. The better the questions, the better the learning. Here are the five questions that have served me very well: (1) **Who** wrote this? (2) **To Whom** was it written? (3) **When** was it written? (4) **Where** was it written? and (5) **Why** was it written?

All five of these questions are extremely important, but the fifth one is absolutely critical. If we do not know **why** a message was written, it will be difficult to understand **what** the author is saying and what he means by it. Properly answering the **why** question almost always unlocks the meaning of the message for us. Since that question is so important to answer, we will spend the bulk of our time this session in answering it. Let's get the other four questions answered first, so that we can take an in-depth look at the **why** question:

The Five Questions Answered:

1. *Who wrote this epistle?* Paul

Who was Paul? What kind of person was he? Paul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia, a Roman city in southeastern Turkey near the Mediterranean Sea and Syria. Because he was well-born in a Roman city, he had Roman citizenship status. He was of the tribe of Benjamin (same tribe as King Saul). His father and other family relatives were evidently Pharisees, since he claimed that he was "a Pharisee, and a son of Pharisees." He tells us that he was raised and educated in Jerusalem (Acts 26:1-11). His tutor was one of the most distinguished Pharisaic rabbis of the day, **R. Gamaliel** the grandson of Hillel. Paul's parents must have been extremely wealthy to afford such a teacher. They evidently had a very profitable tent-making business. Unlike Peter and the other apostles, Paul was seminary-trained in Jerusalem by one of the most prestigious rabbis of the day. No wonder he was able to function so well in the public speaking arena, not only in Jerusalem, but Caesarea, Antioch, Cyprus, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth, and Rome.

Gamaliel (grandson of Hillel, distinguished rabbi and high-ranking Sanhedrin council member) mentioned in Acts 5:34-39. He was Paul's teacher, and his statement to the Sanhedrin was made before Paul was converted. Think about this. Luke, who wrote this account, was a traveling companion of Apostle Paul, and must have gotten this tidbit of information from Paul. It was certainly written with Paul's full awareness and agreement. Now we have to ask what Paul must have thought about this statement of his teacher to the Sanhedrin. We do not know whether Paul was aware of it at the

time, or whether he heard about it later from the apostles after he had become a Christian. But there is nothing improbable about the suggestion that the young Saul of Tarsus, student of Gamaliel, was aware of what his famous teacher had said about the Christians. When we see him later obtaining letters from the High Priest (Caiaphas) to go to foreign cities and arrest Christians, we have to wonder why he was not following the advice of his teacher Gamaliel. Surely Gamaliel would not have advised such a course of action against the Christians. So why does Paul go against his teacher's advice and follow such a drastic course of action against the Church? Could this perhaps be the reason why Jesus at his conversion charges Saul with "kicking against the goads" (Acts 26:14) by going against the advice of his own teacher Gamaliel? This must have been at least one of the factors involved in his "kicking against the goads" that Paul mentioned in his defense before Agrippa II in Acts 26:14.

AD 31 – Stoning of Stephen (Acts 6-7) -- Saints Scattered in the persecution afterwards (Acts 6-8). The young Saul of Tarsus was present at this event, guarding the robes of those men who were stoning Stephen.

AD 33-34 -- Saul's trip to Damascus to arrest Christians. This could have been a little earlier than AD 34, but not any later (without messing up the chronology that Paul gives us in Gal. 1:18 and 2:1). After his conversion he spent time in Arabia and Tarsus, before being summoned to Antioch by Barnabas. It was from Antioch that Barnabas and Paul were sent to do mission work in nearby Cyprus and southeastern Turkey (Pisidia and Galatia).

The most significant thing about Paul's conversion in Damascus was what Jesus said to Ananias about him: *"He is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake"* (Acts 9:15-16). This refrain was restated to Paul and by Paul repeatedly throughout his 30-year missionary career (Acts 22:21; 26:17-20; 27:24; Rom 1:1-5; 1:13-15; 11:13; 15:15-21; Gal 2:7-8; Eph 3:7-8; Col 1:25-29; 1 Tim 2:7). By the time he wrote the epistle to the Romans (AD 58) he was aware that this mission to the Gentiles was not just to convert them, but to teach them and graft them into the Jewish Olive Tree, so that they became a part of the True Israel that would inherit the promises made to Israel. He understood clearly what Christ was trying to accomplish through his missionary work – nothing short of full unity between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. And it was Paul's focus on fully accomplishing this Gentile mission which shaped the contents of this epistle to the Romans. From first chapter to last, Paul has his eye on convincing the Jews to accept the Gentiles, and convincing the Gentiles to humbly unite with the Jews, so that the unity of the faith in the bond of peace might become reality before the Parousia (Eph 4:13). Paul was consumed and obsessed with completing that mission, as he should have been.

2. *To Whom was it written? The beloved saints in Rome (maybe to all churches)*

The “beloved of God in Rome, called as saints” (Rom 1:7). More specifically, Paul addresses the letter to several named individuals at Rome (Rom 16:1-16).

When and how was the church established in Rome? Acts 2:9-11 includes Rome in the list of cities and regions from which there were pilgrims present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Notice it says “visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes” (Acts 1:10). It appears that the church at Rome could trace its origins back to the day of Pentecost, just like the Judean Christians.

Rom 16:7 – *Andronicus* and *Junias* were kinsmen of Paul, who were already Christians before Apostle Paul was converted, and were evidently sent out as missionaries (apostles) to do evangelistic work. Paul says that they had suffered imprisonment just like he had. The proper name *Junias* appears to be a feminine name, suggesting that this was either a husband-wife team (like Priscilla and Aquila) or simply two fleshly relatives of Paul. This raises a lot of interesting speculations. Were these two kinsmen of Paul present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and converted at that time? Since Paul was “brought up and educated” in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3), and had family there (Acts 23:16), it is possible that these Jewish kinsmen from Rome may have been in contact with Paul’s family there in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. This may have provided the young Paul’s first exposure to the gospel. This may shed further light on what Jesus meant when He told Paul that he was kicking against the goads (Acts 26:14). It is like the oxen kicking back against the pointed sticks that the farmer used to prod the oxen to pull the plow. The implication is that Paul may have been resisting the gospel, and only injuring himself by persecuting Christians. We know that his teacher (the Pharisee Rabbi Gamaliel, Acts 22:3) was familiar with the Christians and advised the Sanhedrin not to kill the apostles (Acts 5:34-39). The young man Saul took care of the robes of all the Jewish leaders who stoned Stephen (Acts 7:58), and was in agreement with putting Stephen to death (Acts 8:1). Right after that he began “ravaging the church” and persecuting them. So, Paul had exposure to Christianity at least a year or more before he was converted on the road to Damascus. If his kinsmen from Rome were present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, he could have had exposure to Christianity within his family and acquaintances from the very beginning at Pentecost. The imprisonment that these two relatives of Paul suffered, could be connected with the persecution that broke out after the stoning of Stephen, or even the result of Saul’s actions against his own relatives. This could easily explain why he was so zealously persecuting the Christians. But his resistance was futile. It was like the oxen kicking against the goads. He was only hurting himself by persecuting the Christians.

Rom 16:11 – Another of Paul’s relatives is mentioned here, *Herodion* (Gk HERODIONA).

Rom 16:13 – *Rufus* (son of Simeon of Cyrene?). Douglas Moo, in his commentary on Romans suggested that: “Rufus may be the son of Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross of Christ part of the way to Golgotha. [Footnote: The gospel of Mark identifies Simon as the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21). Favoring that identification are Lightfoot, Godet, Cranfield, and Dunn]. [Douglas Moo, p. 925-926]

The reason we point out all these personal references to individual saints there in Rome, is so that we can see that this letter was not just an impersonal encyclical written as a decretal document to be sent to all the churches. It was much more than that. It was written to some very dear saints there in Rome, many of whom he knew personally, and some of whom were his relatives. Knowing this fact, helps set the tone for the letter, and helps us understand why he frames his argumentation the way he does. He was writing to relatives and friends.

Some commentaries have noted that **Ephesians** was not the only epistle of Paul that had some manuscripts which left out the name of the audience to whom it was addressed. Wieseler mentions the fact that some copies of **Romans** also have this same blank spot in the manuscript, suggesting that both Ephesians and Romans were widely copied and distributed as general encyclicals to all the churches.

That makes a lot of sense in view of Paul's earnest and anxious desire to fully graft the Gentiles into the Church and get the Jewish Christians to accept them, and then use the Gentile blessings to provoke the Jews to jealousy and thus save as many Jews as possible before the end. As far as we know, there were both circumcised Jews and uncircumcised Gentiles in every church (except for Jerusalem), even though the percentages of each may have varied widely from church to church. Jew-Gentile unity was a universal challenge in all of the pre-70 churches. So this would have been a very good epistle to send to all of those churches.

3. *When was Romans written?* Early AD 58

It was written in **AD 58**, near the end of Paul's third missionary journey, while he was staying at Corinth for three months during the winter, in preparation for his trip to Jerusalem in the Spring to carry the Gentile contributions for the support of the needy saints in Jerusalem (Acts 20:2-3). Present with him in Corinth were Timothy, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Tertius, Erastus, Quartus, and Phoebe. Phoebe was a deaconess from Cenchrea (which was one of the two coastal cities attached to Corinth). Phoebe was leaving soon to carry this epistle to Rome, and probably traveled with a group of other Jewish Christians who were going to Rome. Paul was staying at the house of Gaius (of Corinth). This is evidently a different "Gaius" than the one who normally traveled with him (who was from Derbe). Paul sent his commendations of and greetings to Aquila and Priscilla, who were now back in Rome and already had a church meeting in their house (Rom. 16:3-4).

Paul was satisfied that he has established the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, and was already planning a trip to Rome, and then onward to Spain, as soon as he finished his trip to Jerusalem. Paul was anxious to go to Jerusalem with the Gentile contributions, hoping it would accomplish Jewish acceptance of the Gentiles. However, he knew that difficulties awaited him in Jerusalem, but did not know the details. So it was not a big surprise when he was arrested in Jerusalem and sent to Rome for a trial before Nero. Paul may have preferred to follow his original plan to go

to Rome and Spain, but Jesus had a better plan that would more effectively finish the work that Jesus had called him to accomplish.

Five of his epistles had already been written before this epistle to the Romans. This is the last epistle before he was arrested in Jerusalem (AD 58) and sent as a prisoner to Rome (AD 60-61). While in Rome, he wrote five more epistles (AD 62-63). Then after his release, and before his second arrest, he wrote the first two epistles to Titus and Timothy. After his second arrest in the late summer or early fall of 63, he wrote his final epistle to Timothy. Here is the order in which his fourteen epistles were written with their dates:

Galatians (AD 51-52)	Colossians (AD 62-63)
1 Thessalonians (AD 51-52)	Philemon (AD 62-63)
2 Thessalonians (AD 51-52)	Philippians (AD 62-63)
1 Corinthians (AD 57)	Hebrews (AD 62-63)
2 Corinthians (AD 57)	Titus (AD 63)
Romans (AD 58)	1 Timothy (AD 63)
Ephesians (AD 62-63)	2 Timothy (AD 63)

4. *Where was it written?* Corinth (in Achaia, Greece)

Paul wrote his sixth epistle here at **Corinth**, near the end of his third missionary journey, just before he traveled to Jerusalem with the Gentile contributions, where he was arrested and sent to Rome.

5. *Why was it written?* To Promote Jew-Gentile Unity

From the main content of the epistle and its flow of argumentation, it appears that Paul was very concerned about achieving the "unity of the faith" between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. He had just collected the contributions from the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia, and in the Spring he would carry it to Jerusalem with the hope that it would be accepted by the Jewish saints there, and stimulate them to accept the Gentiles as their fellow-heirs of the grace of Christ.

But as we see from the book of Romans, not all Gentile Christians were wanting unity with the Jews. So, there was arrogance by both the Jewish and Gentile Christians. This epistle challenges the Jews to humble themselves and accept the Gentiles, as well as challenges the Gentile saints to recognize their indebtedness to the Jews.

There was a danger of Paul's efforts toward Jew-Gentile unity failing to be achieved, especially there in Rome. Rome and Jerusalem were polar opposites in that regard. The Jewish saints in Jerusalem were having a hard time accepting the uncircumcised and law-free Gentile Christians as fellow-heirs of salvation, while the Gentile saints in Rome thought the Jews had forfeited their rights to the gospel by their unbelief and disobedience, and were therefore permanently cast away and excluded from salvation.

If these two groups of Christians did not accept each other and unite, then everything the apostles had worked for would come to nothing. If the Gentiles did not honor the Jewish roots of their salvation, then they were cutting themselves off from the source of salvation. Likewise, if the Jews kept the salvation all to themselves, then the Gentiles would not be successfully brought into the Jewish Church, and Christianity would have remained just a small faction of Judaism, or completely perished with the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

So, there was a lot at stake here for Apostle Paul especially, whose mission to the Gentiles was focused on grafting the Gentiles into the Jewish Olive Tree, so that All Israel (the spiritual Israel) could be saved. The salvation of both depended on their acceptance of each other and becoming one body in Christ.

It appears that this unity of the faith between the Jews and Gentiles was the most important concern in Paul's mind when he wrote this epistle to the church in Rome. He knew the epistle would be read by both Jews and Gentiles, not only in Rome, but in every church throughout the Diaspora. That is why he challenges both Jews and Gentiles to accept one another and become one in Christ. This was a message that both Rome and Jerusalem (and everyone between) needed to hear at this very time when their arrogance against each other was threatening to permanently destroy their unity, and keep the universal kingdom of all nations from being achieved.

There are multiple factors involved in the writing of this epistle, including the correction of false teaching by Judaizers, Gentilizers, and other errorists and critics (perhaps including Barnabas). The Judaizers accused Paul of teaching Jewish Christians to abandon their law-keeping, while Gentiles were using Paul's condemnation of the Judaizers to justify their wholesale rejection of all the Jews. Paul defends his gospel, and clarifies it in the face of both of these Jewish and Gentile distortions of it.

Barnabas may have been another of the influences upon the Gentile Christians there in Rome, urging them to cast aside the arrogant and unbelieving Jews, and take the Kingdom all to themselves. Paul very effectively demolishes that argument which the epistle of Barnabas champions. In some places in Romans it appears that Paul was very much aware of what Barnabas was teaching, and was using this letter to the Romans as an opportunity to correct that distortion of the gospel.

One of the interesting facts that I noticed as I read through the book of Acts, is that Acts is *front-loaded* and *back-loaded* with references to the Temple, with no references between chapters five and twenty-one. This is significant. It shows that Christianity was very temple-oriented in the beginning. However, starting with the persecution that arose in connection with the martyrdom of Stephen, the disciples scattered away from Jerusalem and into the Gentile world of the Diaspora. For the next quarter of a century (after Stephen's death) there are no references to the temple in Acts until Paul is arrested there in AD 58. The church went through a

transition from totally Jewish in its beginning to a grafting in of the Gentiles and making them one united Church with the Jews. By the time the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, the Gentiles had been fully incorporated into the Church, so that the demise of temple-based Judaism was of minor consequence to the Church. The umbilical cord could then be cut without life-threatening consequences. In the closing chapters of Acts we see the unbelieving Jews forcing the issue. They had tolerated the Church as a sect within Judaism until Paul's missionary efforts began to bring in large numbers of Gentiles. Paul's trip to Jerusalem in AD 58 to bring the Gentile contribution was the beginning of the end. The transition was now complete. Instead of Jews going out from Jerusalem to help the Gentiles, we instead see the Gentile Christians coming "back to Jerusalem" to help the Jewish saints. The Church was now viable outside its mother's womb. The umbilical cord could now be cut, and "cut" it was in AD 70.

In April of 58 AD, Paul headed back to Jerusalem (Acts 20:16) near the end of his third missionary journey. After writing the book of Romans from Corinth during the winter of AD 58, Paul left on his trip back toward Jerusalem to be there in time for Pentecost (June 58 AD). He had to move rapidly in order to get back through Macedonia and Asia before sailing to Palestine. He took the contributions from the Gentile churches (Corinth, Berea, Thessalonica, and Philippi) back to Jerusalem to be distributed to the needy saints there.

By **accepting this gift** from the Gentiles, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were showing that they **accepted the Gentiles** as fellow-heirs of the kingdom (without circumcision and law-keeping). It was a way for the Gentiles to share their material wealth with the Jews, who had shared their spiritual riches with the Gentiles. This was how Jew-Gentile unity was achieved (Eph. 4). The missionary efforts of Apostle Paul were extremely instrumental in grafting the Gentiles into the rich root of the Jewish Olive Tree, so that the **fullness of the Gentiles** might finally arrive, when both Jews and Gentiles inherited the kingdom together at the Parousia of Christ (Rom. 11).

This is a marvelous thing to observe here in Paul's third missionary journey. Paul took great pains to both share the spiritual riches with the Gentiles, and take their material wealth back to Jerusalem to share with the Jewish saints. This sharing (koinonia) of their respective riches blessed both of them, and united them together in one common faith.

At the very time when the non-Christian Jews were cutting off all relationships with the Gentiles, the Jewish Christians were embracing the Gentiles and welcoming them into the Kingdom of Christ. Paul's missionary efforts were the driving force behind this merging of the Gentiles into the one body of Christ.

This is exactly what Paul was referring to in Ephesians 4 when he encouraged the Ephesian Christians and all other Christians who would read this epistle to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the **bond of peace**." This was a very real bond of peace. All

the friction between the Jewish and Gentile Christians was healed by this mutual sharing. This peace was established by each of them (Jew and Gentile) accepting the other, and becoming one in Christ, until they all (both Jew and Gentile) "attained to the unity of the faith... to the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

This was why the apostles and elders in Jerusalem insisted that Paul "remember the poor in Jerusalem" when he went on his journeys. And Paul was delighted to raise these funds from the Gentiles, since he knew it would "seal the deal" (establish a bond of peace) between the Jews and the Gentiles. They both benefited. They became one body in Christ. The Gentiles were accepted as fellow-heirs without circumcision and law-keeping, grafting them into the rich redemptive root of the Jewish Olive Tree.

It is fascinating to see how Paul's exhortations to "accept one another" here in Romans were developed further in the book of Ephesians. Plus, his appeal to the Jewish people in the book of Hebrews to go after the better things in Christ, was designed to "save the rest of the Jews" before the end. Hebrews was designed to make the Jews jealous of the better blessings that the Gentiles were already receiving. After reading the books of Ephesians and Hebrews which were written four or five years after Romans, it is easy to see what Paul was trying to accomplish in this letter to the Romans. It all revolves around his mission to the Gentiles, to fully graft them into the Jewish Olive Tree, and then get the Jewish Christians to accept them. The blessings upon the Gentiles would make the Jews jealous, thus causing some of them to be re-grafted into their own native Olive Tree. And thus, all who were truly a part of the True Spiritual Israel would be saved.

Jun - 58 – Paul arrived in Jerusalem and met with James and all the elders. Paul related all the wonderful things God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. Then the elders of the Jerusalem church told Paul that he had been accused of teaching Jews in the Diaspora to forsake Moses, and not to circumcise their children, nor walk according to the customs. This was the very distortion of his gospel that the book of Romans was designed to correct. It would seem likely then that Paul shared a copy of his Roman epistle with Peter and the saints there in Jerusalem. This may be one of the epistles of Paul that Peter found "hard to understand" and which the extremely Jewish church there found "difficult to accept."

Ephesians 4:1-6 – Preserve Unity

A brief look at Ephesians 4, which was written four or five years after Romans, will help us appreciate how important this idea of Jew-Gentile Unity really was to Paul.

Paul prefaces his remarks here in Ephesians 4 about maintaining unity by reminding them of his imprisonment for the sake of the Lord, who is infinitely worthy of our suffering such shame on His behalf. It is on that basis that Paul appeals to them to tolerate each other in love, since they serve the same Lord who is worthy of our highest efforts.

Paul exhorts the Jewish and Gentile Christians there in Ephesus to be diligent (work hard) to preserve (maintain, guard, retain) their unity. This unity was created originally by the work of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Torah-free gospel. Their response to the gospel not only joined them to Christ, but united them with each other. They covenantally bound (or committed) themselves together (united) to maintain a peaceful (non-coerced or strained) relationship. The basis for that unity between the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians was the work of God in Christ. Both groups (Jews and Gentiles) are members of the same body, have the same Spirit, share the same hope, serve the same Father God and Lord Jesus Christ, believe the same gospel, and were baptized into the same covenantal system of faith. The means of diligently and peacefully maintaining that unity is also clearly delineated: humility, gentleness, patience, and showing tolerance in love.

What also impresses me here in verses four through six, is the way in which Paul defines the basis for Jew/Gentile unity. Look at what they had in common (Gk. *koinonia*): Both Jews and Gentiles were members of the same body, sharers in the same Spirit, having the same hope for everlasting life in heaven above, fellow-subjects of the same Lord, holding to the same system of Faith, having died with, been buried with, and raised with Christ in the same baptism, and worshiping/serving the same God, who is Father of all, over all, through all and in all.

Eph 3:6 – The Mystery

To be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (Ephesians 3:6).

This was the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 3:6), that Gentiles were now fellow-heirs and fellow-members and fellow-partakers. This was a challenge for the Jews to accept, but was great news for the Gentiles to hear about and be allowed to participate in. Both groups, however, are "implored" (Gk. *parakaleo*) to be diligent to preserve that unity by walking with one another in humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and love.

The Gentiles needed to be grateful for the rich heritage their older brothers in the faith (the Jews) had shared with them when they were adopted into the family of God. And the Jews needed to be humble, patient, tolerant and loving toward their new adopted brothers in the faith. It would be a challenge for both groups to get along together and maintain that unity until the purpose of the Law was fulfilled, and heaven and earth passed away. The Jew-Gentile conflict became a moot issue after the destruction of Jerusalem. The basis for Gentile inclusion in the Kingdom had been firmly established by the apostles, so that when the Temple was removed, it did not destroy the universal kingdom of God which had already been preached to all nations.

Conclusion:

We need to keep Paul's goal of achieving Jew-Gentile Unity in mind as we study Romans. It seems to be the primary concern behind most of the contents of this epistle. Knowing this will help us understand **why Paul** says these particular things to this **particular group** of people at this particular **time** and **place**.

In the Appendix, I have included some articles that I wrote for some of my Masters degree courses, which deal with this very issue of Jew-Gentile unity. That material will further reinforce the comments that we have made here.

I would encourage all of us to enrich our understanding of the book of Romans by reading it in several different translations. Become as familiar with the flow of Paul's thinking in Romans as you can. That will make our studies here on the podcast much more meaningful and productive for you.

Throughout the course of our studies I will mention several commentaries and specialized studies of the book of Romans which I deem to be helpful.

If you know of any commentaries on Romans that I might not be aware of, please send me an email about them. I want to cover all the bases in my study preparation.

That pretty much wraps up our study this session. If any of this was unclear or confusing to you, don't hesitate to send me an email asking for more information about it.

That will do it for this session. Thanks so much for listening.

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Appendix A – Jew-Gentile Unity (Research Paper)

The Church United (Eph. 4)

INTRODUCTION

- A. There are four distinct sections to chapter four: (1) In verses 1-6, Paul challenges both the Jewish and Gentile Christians to work hard at preserving their unity around a common God and faith. (2) In verses 7-10, the focus is on the significance of the ascension, and how both Jewish and Gentile Christians shared in the gifts that Christ gave after His ascension. (3) Next in verses 11-16, Paul lists the major gifts that Christ gave to the Church, and what their purpose and function were (edification of the one united body). (4) Then in verses 17-32, Paul urges them all (both Jewish and Gentile Christians) to live their lives in an enlightened way, with a renewed mind, a new self, and showing evidence of being sealed with the Holy Spirit, so that their unity would cause the growth of the church both numerically (by conversion) and spiritually.
- B. The church in Ephesus was right in the heart of one of the most wealthy and prestigious cities in the Roman Empire. Its large temple of Diana brought travelers from all over the empire, who took silver shrines of Diana back with them. There was an incredible deep-rooted paganism and materialism there, as well as Greek and Roman philosophy and culture. It was not an easy or safe place for Jews and Christians to live. Yet, the Apostle Paul does not cut them a break. He instructs them to build a multi-ethnic church right there in Ephesus. The challenge this posed to those Christians there, is acknowledged by Paul here in Ephesians 4 – there were significant moral, ethical, and spiritual challenges, not the least of which was maintaining unity and peace within a diverse group of Greek, Roman, Asian, and Jewish Christians. That was a new challenge which none of them had ever faced before in their Jewish or pagan associations. How do you achieve unity, peace, reconciliation, and cooperation between such an ethnically and culturally diverse group of Jews and Gentiles from several different ethnic backgrounds?
- C. The Holy Spirit speaking through Paul here in this epistle provides the guidance they needed to achieve that unity. He reminds them of what they had to do to become Christians in the first place, what they laid aside, what they put on, and what they needed to keep doing and improving, in order to have unity and peace in that local church.
- D. And, we need to note at the outset that this quest for unity was not invented by Apostle Paul, nor focused exclusively on relationships within local churches. Jesus Himself mentioned this unity and prayed to the Father about it:
1. Jesus said, "other sheep I have" (John 10:16) -- "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must **bring them also**, and they will **hear My voice**; and they will **become one flock with one shepherd.**"
 2. Jesus prayed for unity among His disciples (John 17)
 3. I believe Jesus was referring to the Jew-Gentile unity that He knew would become a crucial factor in the surviving and thriving of His Church for the long-term.
- E. Furthermore, it seems clear from the nature of Paul's exhortations here, that his remarks are not directed at the Ephesians only, but intended for a much wider audience, including those other churches in nearby Asia Minor who shared the same ethnic and cultural characteristics of the Ephesian church. And it would provide a blueprint for all other churches in the first century, and for all generations to come. So, let's look at all the things that are involved in Paul's recipe for unity among Jews and Gentiles.

I. What Kind of Unity Is This Talking About? Basis for that Unity?

- This **Mystery** of Jew-Gentile Unity was directly related to the **Fullness of the Gentiles** which Paul had taught to the Roman church four or five years earlier (Rom. 11). Throughout the two decades leading up to Paul's imprisonment in Rome, the Gentiles were gradually being grafted into what began as a totally Jewish Olive Tree. It was critical to the long-term survival of the Church that the Gentiles be fully grafted into the Olive Tree (Rom. 11) before the End of the Temple system occurred in AD 70. The apostles had one generation to pull that off. It was a deadline they had to scramble to meet.
- The Unity is directly related to the Mystery – Chapters 1 and 3 of this same letter had already introduced and explained the Mystery. "The Mystery" was talking about the Unity between Jews and Gentiles. This was **the mystery** that was hidden from all ages and nations of mankind, including even the nation of Israel, before the arrival of the Lamb of God who took away all our sin and became such a blessing to all the nations (not just Israel). The people of Israel did not at all understand that the Gentiles could be saved without circumcision and law-keeping. This was more than just a mystery to the Jews, it was an unthinkable impossibility. Circumcision and law-keeping was an absolute covenantal essential.
- Here are the basic texts which mention the "mystery" in relation to the Gentiles: Eph. 1:9; 3:3-4; 3:9; ch. 4; 5:32; 6:19. There is much more *mystery* in Ephesians than just the marriage relationship between Christ and the Church. Paul specifically uses the word *mystery* in an additional sense here in Ephesians, specifically in reference to the Gentiles being fellow heirs with True Israel in the blessings of redemption, reconciliation, and fellowship with God. Paul gets very specific in 3:3-6 when he clearly unveils the meaning of the redemptive mystery: "*Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*"
- All Jews (including Jewish Christians) would agree with Paul's statement in 3:9 where he claims that this *mystery* about Gentile inclusion in the Kingdom without circumcision and law-keeping, was for all previous ages kept ambiguous by God, not only from humans, but from the "rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" as well. In fact, it was the failure to understand this mystery which drove the Judaizers to force the Gentiles to be circumcised. They had not understood from the Old Testament writings that Gentiles would be accepted into the Messianic blessings without circumcision and law-keeping. That was indeed a mystery to them, veiled through all ages up to the advent of Christ.
- The Israelites were the sheep of Yahweh's pasture. The Gentiles were the unclean animals (lions, bears, wolves). But when the eternal kingdom of the Messiah came, the unclean animals would lie down at peace in the same pasture with God's sheep. There would be no more dividing wall of enmity (circumcision and law-keeping). There would be a new covenant of peace and reconciliation between Israel and all other nations. The Seed of Abraham came to be a blessing to all the nations (Gentiles), not just Israel.
- This was the ultimate *paradox* (absurdity, impossibility) to the Israelite. It was impossible for them to believe that God had actually planned all along to save the Gentiles without circumcision, and had kept it *hidden* from them until "the time was fulfilled" and the Kingdom of Heaven arrived. The Jews could not accept this idea, even when it was *unveiled* right in front of their face with supernatural and miraculous power through the work of Jesus and the apostles.

- In chapter four, Paul dumps the whole "mystery" load on the Ephesian church, which included a significant number of both Jews and Gentiles (ethnically diverse), who were evidently not "being diligent [enough] to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). Paul explains to them that this Jew-Gentile unity was the ultimate goal of the redemptive mystery, and that the redemptive plan (i.e., "the fullness of Christ") could not be achieved without this "unity of the faith" between Jews and Gentiles. This theme was first introduced by Paul in Romans 11 (written five years before Ephesians), and now developed much more clearly here in Ephesians.
- Basis for Unity -- An extremely important part of Paul's instructions to both Jews and Gentiles, was to remind them both that they literally had the SAME Lord, Faith, Baptism, etc. There was not two separate religions competing against each other. They were fellow-members of the SAME family of God. All the facts of the gospel were the basis for their unity. There were not two separate gospels. Same Cross of Christ for both groups.
- Basis for the Unity -- Eph. 4:1-6 -- Paul exhorts the Jewish and Gentile Christians there in Ephesus to be diligent (work hard) to preserve (maintain, guard, retain) their unity. This unity was created originally by the work of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Torah-free gospel. Their response to the gospel not only joined them to Christ, but united them with each other. They covenantally bound (or committed) themselves together (united) to maintain a peaceful (non-coerced or strained) relationship. The basis for that unity between the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians was the work of God in Christ. Both groups (Jews and Gentiles) are members of the *same* body, have the *same* Spirit, share the *same* hope, serve the *same* Father God and Lord Jesus Christ, believe the *same* gospel, and were baptized into the *same* covenantal system of faith. The means of *diligently* and *peacefully* maintaining that unity is also clearly delineated: humility, gentleness, patience, and showing tolerance in love.
- More on the Basis for Unity -- Here in Eph. 4:4-6, notice what Paul says they had in common: Both Jews and Gentiles were members of the *same body*, sharers in the *same Spirit*, having the *same hope* for everlasting life in heaven above, fellow-subjects of the *same Lord*, holding to the same system of *Faith*, having died with, buried with, and raised with Christ in the *same baptism*, and worshiping/serving the *same God*, who is Father of all, over all, through all and in all. This was **the mystery of the gospel** (Eph. 3:6), that Gentiles were now fellow-heirs and fellow-members and fellow-partakers. This was a challenge for the Jews to accept, but was *great news* for the Gentiles to hear about and be allowed to participate in. Both groups, however, are "implored" (Gk. *parakaleo*) to be diligent to preserve that unity by walking with one another in humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and love. The Gentiles needed to be grateful for the rich heritage their older brothers in the faith (the Jews) had shared with them when they were adopted into the family of God. And the Jews needed to be humble, patient, tolerant and loving toward their new adopted brothers in the faith. It would be a challenge for both groups to get along together and maintain that unity. But it was absolutely critical for them to do so, if the Church was going to survive the massive upheaval that the next few years would bring.

II. Why Was Unity So Crucial? What Was at Stake? What Were the Benefits?

- What was at stake? -- The church went through a transition from totally Jewish in its beginning to a grafting in of the Gentiles and making them one united Church with the Jews. By the time the Temple was destroyed in AD 70, the Gentiles had been fully

incorporated into the Church, so that the demise of temple-based Judaism was of little enduring consequence to the Church.

- Redemptive & Evangelistic Benefits -- The Church has a huge role to play in reconciling "all the nations" with each other and with God. That is how Abraham's seed (Christ) would be a blessing to all the nations. All nations are ONE (united) in the Church and in Christ.

III. How Would It Be Achieved? The Blueprint? The Means?

- Blueprint -- Paul had a much bigger goal of unity between Jews and Gentiles than just this one congregation in Ephesus. This unity was crucial for the survival of the Church beyond AD 70. But the means of achieving that unity on a global scale was very similar to the way it worked inside the local church. In other words, what the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Ephesus had to do in order to have unity and peace and have impact in their community, was the same kind of things that all local churches would need to do. What Paul wrote to the Ephesian church was the model or blueprint for the rest of the churches to follow in building and growing their churches in unity and peace.
- Means by which it was accomplished -- Apostle Paul was the champion of Gentile liberty, so anything given by him to the Gentiles can be considered eternal, since he would not allow the Gentiles to be brought into bondage to anything that was destined to pass away at AD 70. And anything which the apostles forbid to the Gentiles must be considered things that would not be included in the Kingdom when it arrived. In fact, Paul says they would be under a curse (and severed from Christ) if they tried to bind upon the Gentiles things that were destined to pass away at AD 70 (cf. Galatians and Romans). Whatever Paul gave to the Gentiles was destined to remain in the church throughout all generations, unless it was specifically stated that it would cease, such as the charismata. The rest of the things given by Paul to the Gentiles were implied to continue throughout all generations of the Church.
- This incorporation of uncircumcised Gentiles into the Jewish Church was not clearly unveiled for the Jewish Christians until the conversion of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10). Up to that point (AD 38), there was no such thing as an uncircumcised Gentile Christian. This inclusion of Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles into the Church without circumcision was immediately and vigorously challenged by the "circumcised" Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 11:2-3). Peter explained how God had revealed to him that "what God has [now] cleansed, we should no longer consider unholy" (Acts 11:9), and that "God gave to [the uncircumcised Gentiles] the same gift as He gave to us [Jews]" (Acts 11:17). He gave them the same Lord, the same faith, the same baptism, and all things. There were not two separate systems of faith, one for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. Both shared the same Lord, faith, baptism, etc. (Eph. 4:4-6).
- From that new beginning with Cornelius (in AD 38), the exclusively Jewish Church was set on course for its eventual **acceptance** (grafting in) of the Gentiles as "fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:6). Peter was given the keys of the Kingdom to open the door for the Gentiles, and he opened the door in a big way beginning with Cornelius. But not all Jewish Christians accepted the Gentiles right away. The Judaizer controversy raged throughout the Church, inside and outside of Palestine. Even after the Jerusalem council in AD 49 (a decade after Cornelius), Paul still had to correct the Galatians (AD 52), the Romans (AD 57), and even the Ephesians (AD 62-63), who were all struggling toward unity.
- As a result of the efforts of all the apostles, and especially Apostle Paul (the champion of

- Gentile liberty), the Gentile believers were increasingly **accepted** into the sheep fold of true spiritual Israel (the Church). This acceptance was crucial to their incorporation into the Body of Christ (the Church) where salvation is found. Paul wanted the whole remnant of believing Israelites to be saved, but he knew the Gentiles had to be brought in first, to make the Jews jealous, and thus attract the rest of his fellow Jews back to Christ (Rom. 9-11).
- One of the ways we see this in action was when Paul collected a generous contribution from the Gentile churches and took it to the mother church in Jerusalem. The Jews had been willing to share their **spiritual riches** with the Gentiles, and now we see the Gentiles sending their sacrifices, offerings, and gifts back to Jerusalem to decorate the true Temple (the Church). This **sharing** (koinonia) between the Jews and Gentiles **cemented** the relationship between the Jewish and Gentile believers. When the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem **accepted** those generous contributions from the Gentiles, they were in net effect **grafting** the wild olive branches into the native Olive Tree (Rom. 11). It was **incorporating** them into the Church. It was **bringing the Gentiles into their fullness**, which made the Jews jealous and provoked them to be grafted back into their own native Olive Tree. It is profound and utterly astounding to watch this transition taking place throughout the book of Acts and the Epistles of Paul.
 - This process of incorporating the Gentiles into the true Israel (the Church) was well underway by the time Paul wrote Romans 11 (AD 58), and was pretty much finished by the time Paul wrote to the Ephesians (AD 62-63). By the time the physical temple was destroyed in AD 70, the **transition** from a Jewish Church to a **universal Church** composed of all nations was complete. The Gentiles had been fully accepted as fellow heirs of the grace of life, and had been firmly engrafted into the Olive Tree, incorporated into the Body of Christ. Now, two-thousand years later, we take it for granted that uncircumcised Gentiles can be Christians, and that the Church does not need circumcision, law-keeping, festivals, or the temple and sacrifices to be the true people of God. Those things no longer come to mind, now that the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Rom. 11).

IV. What Would Be Required? What Were the Obstacles?

- Paul and the apostles binding things upon the Gentiles -- The apostles were very careful not to bind upon the Gentiles anything which was destined to pass away at the Parousia. The Gentiles were not commanded to do anything which only pertained to the Jews and the Old Covenant age, and which was destined to cease at AD 70 (unless it had a disclaimer attached to it, like the charismatic gifts). Gentiles were only given things that pertained to life in the Eternal Kingdom that was about to fully arrive.
- Furthermore, it needs to be emphasized that Gentiles **were commanded** to be baptized, observe the Lord's Supper, assemble as a church on the first day of every week, pool their resources for the purposes of evangelism, benevolence, and edification, as well as maintain a certain (absolute, fixed) pattern of doctrine and church organizational structure (elders, deacons, teachers, and evangelists). *This implies (necessarily, I believe) that whatever the apostles bound upon the Gentiles for their belief and practice BEFORE AD 70, would also be bound upon the Church AFTER AD 70, unless it was specifically singled out for cessation at AD 70 (e.g., the charismata).*
- Acts 21:17-36 -- It is amazing to see "how many thousands of Law-zealous Jewish believers" there were still entrenched in the church in Jerusalem at this late date (AD 58), almost thirty years after Pentecost! Evidently they had conceded that Gentiles could be

saved without circumcision (after Acts 10 and Acts 15), but they were not willing for any Christian Jews to live law-free like the Gentiles. They adamantly insisted that all Jewish Christians, both inside Palestine and outside in the Diaspora continue keeping every jot and tittle of the Law. They were strictly following what Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-20, not realizing that it was destined to end soon when the Temple was demolished and the sacrificial system totally abolished. *It was already fulfilled by the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.* It only continued to be practiced by Jewish Christians as a good testimony to their fellow Jews, so that fellow Jews would listen to the gospel coming from fellow law-abiding Jews. But these "Law-zealous" Jewish Christians in Jerusalem went beyond that, believing that continued practice of the Law was absolutely essential for every Jewish Christian. They demanded that all Jewish Christians (even outside in the Diaspora) continue to circumcise their children and keep all the customs of Moses, no exceptions. Paul recognized the importance of the principle of Jesus in Matt. 5:17-20, and adhered to it, but not for the same reasons as the Judaizers. His practice was "becoming all things to all men for the sake of the gospel." That meant that Jewish Christians could drop the customs of Moses if they wished, but it would be like renouncing their citizenship rights. They could not expect to have any further influence on their fellow Jews for the gospel sake, but they would be able to identify with Gentiles and preach the gospel to them. They would be looked upon by the Jews as being law-breakers. No Jew would listen to them. So, until the temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system was abolished in AD 70, it was expedient for the gospel sake to continue practicing the jots and tittles, so that Jews everywhere would be willing to listen to the gospel coming from fellow law-keeping Jews. The Law was not kept for salvation sake (like the Judaizers insisted), but rather for the gospel sake (like Jesus and Paul both taught), so that the Jews could have "first right of refusal" on the gospel before the Temple was destroyed and their Old Covenant religion came to its "End of Days" in AD 70. It was "to the Jews first" but not "to the Jews only." And it was only "to the Jews first" until the Temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system passed away. After that, the Gentiles were on equal footing with the Jews to receive the gospel, with no priority status to the Jews any longer. After that, the Gentiles had been grafted into the Olive Tree and their Fullness (equal status in the Church) arrived (cf. Rom. 11). The Church survived the downfall of Temple Judaism because it was "Gentile-friendly" and no longer exclusively Jewish. It had successfully made the transition from a Jewish Church to a universal Church for "all the nations".

V. How Do We Know Unity Was Achieved? What Did It Look Like?

- On the day of Pentecost (AD 30) there were **Jews from Asia Minor** (Turkey): "Cappadocia, Pontus, **Asia**, Phrygia and Pamphylia (Acts 2:9-10). Twenty-eight years later (AD 58) when Paul was arrested in the Temple, he mentions that there were **Jews from Asia** present at this Pentecost as well (Acts 21:27-29 24:18-19). Paul had gone to that feast at the end of his third journey, bringing a **huge contribution from the Gentiles** to benefit the Jewish Christians in Judea, showing that the Jewish Christians had shared their **spiritual blessings** with the Gentiles, and in gratitude the Gentile Christians reciprocated by sharing their **material blessings** with the Jewish Christians. This act of reciprocal sharing was the very proof that the Gentiles had been accepted (grafted) into the Jewish Church. This made the unbelieving Jews jealous, so as to save even more of them, so that the Jewish believers could then be grafted back into their own Olive Tree (Rom. 11).

- When the Gentile Contributions Came to Jerusalem, that was the signal that the Unity (Fullness of the Gentiles) had arrived -- In the closing chapters of Acts we see the Jews forcing the issue. They had tolerated the Church as a sect within Judaism until Paul's missionary efforts began to bring in large numbers of Gentiles. They did not like wild Olive Tree Gentiles being grafted into their native Olive Tree, so they arrested the apostle who was doing the grafting! Paul's trip to Jerusalem in AD 58 to bring the Gentile contribution was the beginning of the end. The transition was now complete. Instead of Jewish Christians continuing to go out of Jerusalem to help the Gentiles, we instead see Gentile Christians coming "back to Jerusalem" (full circle) to help the Jewish saints. The Gentiles had been fully incorporated (grafted) into the Jewish Church. The Church is now viable outside its mother's womb. The umbilical cord could be cut without life-threatening consequences, and "cut" it was in AD 70.
- Acts 22:21-22 -- As soon as Paul mentioned that Christ had sent him "far away to the Gentiles" they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live." The Roman commander, a Gentile, was baffled by this crowd reaction to Paul's statement about going to the Gentiles. Throughout the first century leading up to the Jewish revolt in AD 66, the Jews were backing away more and more from their entanglements with the Gentiles. In AD 66, the war was instigated when the priestly Zealot leader Eleazar b. Ananias banned all Gentile sacrifices and offerings from the temple. *At the very time when the Christians were embracing the Gentiles (through Apostle Paul's missionary efforts) and grafting them into the Church as fellow heirs of the Kingdom, the Jews in Palestine were severing all connections with the Gentiles and pushing them away from any of the benefits of Judaism. Quite a contrast.* We can see that anti-Gentile sentiment here at Paul's arrest in Jerusalem.
- The church today is comprised of a huge majority of Gentiles, but it was not that way in the first century. Paul literally risked his life to take the gospel "far away to the Gentiles," and forty of those Jews in Jerusalem wanted to make that risk a reality.
- By the time of the Jewish Zealot revolt in AD 66, the Jewish priesthood (e.g., Eleazar b. Ananias) had gone so far as to forbid the sacrifices of any uncircumcised Gentiles to be offered in the temple, while at the same time the Gentiles had been fully incorporated into the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 11:24-32). What a contrast! At a time when the Jews had pushed the Gentiles completely out of their religion, the Christians had welcomed uncircumcised Gentile believers with open arms and accepted them as fellow heirs of the grace of life.
- At the time when the Jews were stirring up revolt against the Romans, here the Christians were embracing the Romans and preaching peace and reconciliation to them! Amazing grace!
- I said all that to make the following points: What the Premillennialists (like Snodgrass) see as a "not yet" characteristic of Christianity, i.e. the not yet "attaining to the unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13), we Preterists would see as the finished work of the Apostles. Furthermore, if the "unity of the faith" (the successful incorporation of the Gentiles into the Church) has not occurred yet (as the Premillennialists claim), then how is it that the Church today (ever since AD 70) is overwhelmingly Gentile? From the looks of the Olive Tree today, it appears that Gentiles are not just a few engrafted branches on an overwhelmingly Jewish Tree (as it was in the first two decades of the Church), but instead we comprise almost all of the visible branches! The roots and trunk are indeed Jewish, but just about all

the branches are Gentiles, again showing that the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, and that both Jews and Gentiles attained to the unity of the faith (Rom. 11; Eph. 4:13).

CONCLUSION

- It is utterly breathtaking to study the life of Paul and see how Christ worked around him, upon him, inside him, through him, and out of him to accomplish the incorporation of the Gentiles into the new spiritual Israel (the Church, the Eternal Kingdom). There is no other way to explain the success of that mission without the intimate involvement of Christ providentially and miraculously in every facet of his life. There were too many human obstacles and demonic powers set against him. Only Christ and his angels could have enabled him to succeed in that ministry, and Paul constantly recognizes that fact in all his letters, especially in his prison epistles, like *Ephesians*. Every one of us preachers, teachers, and missionaries need to follow his example of complete trust and reliance upon Christ to carry us through every challenge that we face in our ministries. Only through firm reliance upon Christ will we ever be able to bear much fruit for the Kingdom like Paul and the other apostles did.
- Not only was this model of Jew-Gentile unity given for the church in Ephesus and the whole first century Church, but also for all generations to come. This very example of how the ethnically, racially, culturally, and religiously diverse group of Christians in Ephesus were able to become one body in Christ, is the same way the church of all ages can "preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." As we have seen, Paul clearly spells out the formula for unity and peace right here in Ephesians 4.
- In closing, I like the way Dr. Truman Scott summarized this idea of unity in his *Thematic Study Guide*: "To all believers, Jews and Gentiles, it declares the intentions of God that all nationalities would enjoy peace with one another and peace with God in one body through Jesus Christ. Citizenship with all of its privileges was equally offered to all peoples [in the Church]. ... the wall of hostility [between Jew and Gentile is broken down in the Church]. ..Unity in the bond of peace as fellow-citizens [is now found in the Church]."

Recommended Reading on Jew-Gentile Unity

- Bockmuel, M. N. A. *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity*. Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1990.
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- Caragounis, Chrys C. *The Ephesian Mysterion: Meaning and Content*. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1977. Snodgrass: "...an investigation of the term *mystery*."
- Dahl, N. A. 'Gentiles, Christians, and Israelites in the Epistle to the Ephesians.' *Harvard Theological Review*, 79 (1986), pp. 31-39.
- Hanson, S. *The Unity of the Church in the New Testament: Colossians and Ephesians*. Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1946.
- Radar, William. *The Church and Racial Hostility: A History of Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11-22*. Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1978. Snodgrass: "This book provides a chronicle of the interpretation of 2:11-22 from the Apostolic Fathers right up to the modern period and brings this history into the modern discussion about race relations."

Scott, Truman. *Christ in His Church in Ephesians: A Thematic Study Guide in Ephesians*.
Lubbock, Texas USA: Sunset International Bible Institute, no date.

Stevens, Edward E. *First Century Events in Chronological Order*. Bradford, Pennsylvania USA:
International Preterist Association, 2009.

Appendix B – Jew-Gentile Unity

Article 3: “The Mystery” in Ephesians

John T. Stevenson. Article entitled: “The Mystery of Christ” accessed on 3/12/12 and found at this URL: <http://www.angelfire.com/nt/theology/eph3-01.html>

All of us Gentile Christians should take great delight in the fact that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). We were outcasts from God and without hope in this dark and sinful world. But God planned to bring us back to Him and reconcile Himself to us. It was not just the Hebrew people who were chosen to be His people. He has called out from among all nations a people for His own possession. Only a sovereign and perfect God could and would do such a thing. His holy Name be blessed, praised, and exalted above all names in the universe.

This was the mystery that was hidden from all ages and nations of mankind, including even the nation of Israel, before the arrival of the Lamb of God who took away all our sin and became such a blessing to all the nations (not just Israel). The people of Israel did not at all understand that the Gentiles could be saved without circumcision and law-keeping. This was more than just a mystery to the Jews, it was an unthinkable impossibility. Circumcision and law-keeping was an absolute covenantal essential.

By the time of the Jewish Zealot revolt in AD 66, the Jewish priesthood (e.g., Eleazar b. Ananias) had gone so far as to forbid the sacrifices of any uncircumcised Gentiles to be offered in the temple, while at the same time the Gentiles had been fully incorporated into the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 11:24-32). What a contrast! At a time when the Jews had pushed the Gentiles completely out of their religion, the Christians had welcomed uncircumcised Gentile believers with open arms and accepted them as fellow heirs of the grace of life.

This was the ultimate *paradox* (absurdity, impossibility) to the Israelite. It was impossible for them to believe that God had actually planned all along to save the Gentiles without circumcision, and had kept it *hidden* from them until "the time was fulfilled" and the Kingdom of Heaven arrived. The Jews could not accept this idea, even when it was *unveiled* right in front of their face with supernatural and miraculous power through the work of Jesus and the apostles.

In this online article by John Stevenson, he talks about Paul as the *steward* of this mystery (Eph. 3:2). Paul frames his discussion about the *mystery* (Eph. 3:1; 4:1) by saying twice that he was the *prisoner*, not of the Jews or of Rome, but of the Lord (Gk. *kurios*) Jesus Christ. This is an extremely interesting statement. Paul considered his imprisonment as part of the divine plan of Christ to use him as a *steward* (servant) to unveil the mystery to the Gentiles through his imprisonment in both Caesarea and Rome. To how many important people in high places was Paul able to preach, as a result of his five years of imprisonment (AD 58-63): (1) The high priest Ananias, the Sanhedrin, and the leadership of the Pharisees and Sadducees at his trial in Jerusalem; (2) Roman soldiers both in his imprisonment and on his voyage to Rome; (3) Felix, Festus, Agrippa II; plus (4) Nero and the whole praetorian guard in Rome. Only God could have providentially arranged such an opportunity as this! Incredible outworking of His predetermined plan to save the Gentiles! At the time when the Jews were stirring up revolt against the Romans, here the Christians were embracing the Romans and preaching peace and reconciliation to them! Amazing grace!

The "Mystery" and Jew-Gentile "Unity"

Here are the basic texts which mention the "mystery" in relation to the Gentiles: Eph. 1:9; 3:3-4; 3:9; ch. 4; 5:32; 6:19. There is much more *mystery* in Ephesians than just the marriage relationship between Christ and the Church. Paul specifically uses the word *mystery* in an additional sense here in Ephesians, specifically in reference to the Gentiles being fellow heirs with True Israel in the blessings of redemption, reconciliation, and fellowship with God.

According to Eph. 1:9, the mystery had something to do with God's eternal purpose in sending Christ into the world, to wrap up all things redemptively that had been left hanging since the Fall of Adam. Paul gets even more specific in 3:3-6 when he clearly unveils the meaning of the redemptive mystery: "*Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*"

All Jews (including Jewish Christians) would agree with Paul's statement in 3:9 where he claims that this *mystery* about Gentile inclusion in the Kingdom without circumcision and law-keeping, was for all previous ages kept ambiguous by God, not only from humans, but from the "rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" as well. In fact, it was the failure to understand this mystery which drove the Judaizers to force the Gentiles to be circumcised. They had not understood from the Old Testament writings that Gentiles would be accepted into the Messianic blessings without circumcision and law-keeping. That was indeed a mystery to them, veiled through all ages up to the advent of Christ.

Then in chapter four, Paul dumps the whole "mystery" load on the Ephesian church, which included a significant number of both Jews and Gentiles (ethnically diverse), who were evidently not "being diligent [enough] to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). Paul explains to them that this Jew-Gentile unity was the ultimate goal of the redemptive mystery, and that the redemptive plan (i.e., "the fullness of Christ") could not be achieved without this "unity of the faith" between Jews and Gentiles. This theme was first introduced by Paul in Romans 11 (written five years before Ephesians), and now developed much more clearly here in Ephesians.

This issue of Jew-Gentile oneness in the first century church is one example of how Snodgrass failed to notice Paul's original intent and application, in his rush to make an application to the modern church. Snodgrass rightly notes that the word *unity* (Gk. *henotes*) is used only here in Eph. 4:3 and 4:13. Then he states that the usage in 4:13 is eschatological, pointing to the "not yet character of Christianity" and being the eschatological "goal toward which we strive" (Snodgrass 198). I do not disagree with his application for us today, however I do believe he has failed to notice the application that Paul makes to the first century church.

Jesus told his disciples: "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd" (John 10:16). I seriously doubt whether His disciples understood this statement as applying to uncircumcised Gentiles. If they connected the Gentiles with it at all, it would only have been with the stipulation that they had to be circumcised first before being allowed to become one flock with the Jewish sheep fold.

The Israelites were the sheep of Yahweh's pasture. The Gentiles were the unclean animals (lions, bears, wolves). But when the eternal kingdom of the Messiah came, the unclean animals would lie down at peace in the same pasture with God's sheep. There would be no more dividing wall of enmity (circumcision and law-keeping). There would be a new covenant of peace and

reconciliation between Israel and all other nations. The Seed of Abraham came to be a blessing to all the nations (Gentiles), not just Israel.

This incorporation of uncircumcised Gentiles into the Jewish Church was not clearly unveiled for the Jewish Christians until the conversion of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10). Up to that point (AD 38), there was no such thing as an uncircumcised Gentile Christian. This inclusion of Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles into the Church without circumcision was immediately and vigorously challenged by the "circumcised" Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 11:2-3). Peter explained how God had revealed to him that "what God has [now] cleansed, we should no longer consider unholy" (Acts 11:9), and that "God gave to [the uncircumcised Gentiles] the same gift as He gave to us [Jews]" (Acts 11:17). He gave them the same Lord, the same faith, the same baptism, and all things. There were not two separate systems of faith, one for the Jews and another for the Gentiles. Both shared the same Lord, faith, baptism, etc. (Eph. 4:4-6).

From that new beginning with Cornelius (in AD 38), the exclusively Jewish Church was set on course for its eventual *acceptance* of the Gentiles as "fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:6). Peter was given the keys of the Kingdom to open the door for the Gentiles, and he opened the door in a big way beginning with Cornelius. But not all Jewish Christians *accepted* the Gentiles right away. The Judaizer controversy raged throughout the Church, inside and outside Palestine. Even after the Jerusalem council in AD 49, Paul still had to correct the Galatians (AD 52), the Romans (AD 57), and even the Ephesians (AD 62-63).

As a result of the efforts of all the apostles, and especially Apostle Paul (the champion of Gentile liberty), the Gentile believers were increasingly *accepted* into the sheep fold of true spiritual Israel (the Church). This acceptance was crucial to their incorporation into the Body of Christ (the Church) where salvation is found. Paul wanted the whole remnant of believing Israelites to be saved, but he knew the Gentiles had to be brought in first, to make the Jews jealous, and thus attract them back to Christ.

One of the ways we see this in action was when Paul collected a generous contribution from the Gentile churches and took it to the mother church in Jerusalem. The Jews had been willing to share their spiritual riches with the Gentiles, and now we see the Gentiles sending their sacrifices, offerings, and gifts back to Jerusalem to decorate the true Temple (the Church). This sharing (koinonia) between the Jews and Gentiles cemented the relationship between the Jewish and Gentile believers. When the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem *accepted* those generous contributions from the Gentiles, they were in net effect grafting the wild olive branches into the native Olive Tree (Rom. 11). It was incorporating them into the Church. It was bringing the Gentiles into their fullness, which made the Jews jealous and provoked them to be grafted back into their own native Olive Tree.

This process of incorporating the Gentiles into the true Israel (the Church) was well underway by the time Paul wrote Romans 11 (AD 57), and was almost finished by the time Paul wrote to the Ephesians (AD 62-63). By the time the physical temple was destroyed in AD 70, the transition from a Jewish Church to a universal Church composed of all nations was complete. The Gentiles had been fully accepted as fellow heirs of the grace of life, and had been firmly engrafted into the Olive Tree, incorporated into the Body of Christ. Now, two-thousand years later, we take it for granted that Gentiles can be Christians, and that the Church does not need circumcision, law-keeping, festivals, the temple and sacrifices. Those things no longer come to mind, now that the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Rom. 11).

I said all that to make the following points: What Snodgrass, a *Premillennialist*, sees as a "not yet" characteristic of Christianity, i.e. the not yet "attaining to the unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13), we *Amillennialists* would see as a finished work of the Apostles. Furthermore, if the "unity of the faith" (the successful incorporation of the Gentiles into the Church) has not occurred yet (as Snodgrass and other Premillennialists claim), then how is it that the Church today (ever since AD 70) is overwhelmingly Gentile? From the looks of the Olive Tree today, it appears that Gentiles are not just a few engrafted branches among an overwhelmingly Jewish Tree (as it was in the first two decades of the Church), but instead we comprise almost all of the visible branches! The roots and trunk are indeed Jewish, but just about all the branches are Gentiles, again showing that the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, and that both Jews and Gentiles attained to the unity of the faith (Rom. 11; Eph. 4:13).

So, regarding my analysis of Snodgrass in his interpretation of the "**mystery**" and its connection with Jew-Gentile "**unity**" in the Church, I see this as a real weak spot in his commentary. He let his eschatological presuppositions determine his interpretation and application of Ephesians 4, shortchanging not only his readers, but robbing himself of a much better understanding of the great *mystery* of the faith for first century Jews and Gentiles.

Unity Developed in the Book of Acts

The following statements show how the Unity was achieved in that generation. Look at all the miraculous and providential work that God did through the apostles to bring the Gentiles fully into the Kingdom without disinheriting the Jews (but instead blessing the Jews even more with the benefits coming from the Gentiles).

- Acts 2.5-13 -- devout men from every nation...hear them in our own language...Jews and proselytes...full of sweet wine – these are all statements that have cultural overtones
- 6.1-6 -- Hellenistic Jews ... the native Hebrews ... proselyte from Antioch – three different kinds of Jewish believers. The Hellenistic Jews practiced circumcision like the others, but took a more philosophical approach to the interpretation and application of the Law, much like Philo and other rabbinical teachers in Greece and Rome.
- 6.9 -- Synagogue of the Freedmen ...Cyrenians and Alexandrians... from Cilicia and Asia argued with Stephen – various sects and nationalities of Jews (like denominations)
- 8.5 -- Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them – this was culturally questionable for Jews to associate with the Samaritans religiously
- 8.27 -- Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure ... reading the prophet Isaiah [he had a scroll of Isaiah, costly and valuable, reading it on the chariot while traveling, must have been newly purchased for the Ethiopian library] – the Ethiopians were very tightly connected with the Temple in Jerusalem, and had been since the days of Solomon at least.
- 9.29 -- Paul "was arguing with the Hellenistic Jews, but they were attempting to put him to death" [this was before Cornelius conversion and before the Acts 15 Judaizer controversy -- What did Paul say to the Hellenistic Jews which made them want to kill him?
- 10.1-2, 7 -- a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian cohort ...who feared God ... gave many alms ... prayed to God continually ... summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier

- 10.9-16, 28, 35 (cf. 11:3-18) -- four-footed animals and crawling creatures and birds of the air ... kill and eat [What was the point of this vision? Not to make unclean animals eatable, but rather to show that the Gentiles were no longer to be rejected just because they were uncircumcised.]
- 11.19 -- those who were scattered... made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But some of them from Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks.
- 11.29 -- [Antioch Christians] send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea [who were under a famine]
- 13.26 -- "sons of Abraham's family and those among you who fear God" -- The God-fearers were obviously Gentiles who believed in the God of Israel and worshiped Him, but had not been circumcised. These folks were the prime target of Paul's Law-free gospel. These Gentiles already believed in God and wanted all the blessings of the Jewish Kingdom, yet could not accept the custom of circumcision. The gospel liberated them, and gave them the internal salvation they longed for, without requiring the external circumcision.
- 13:48-52 -- Notice the contrast here between the way the Gentiles and Jews reacted to the gospel (the Gentiles with rejoicing, glorifying, belief, joy and the Holy Spirit, versus incitement, instigation of persecution, driving Paul and Barnabas out of their district). The Jews viewed the gospel as compromise with the uncleanness and unlawful lifestyle and culture of the Gentiles. [See a similar situation in 17:1-9]
- 15:6-11 -- At the council in Jerusalem, the Judaizing brethren tried to bring the Gentile believers into bondage to circumcision and law-keeping, but Peter and James and the other leaders there explained that the hearts of the Gentiles were cleansed by faith (circumcision of the heart, as Moses had taught), and the proof of that cleansing, acceptance, and forgiveness by God was the outpouring of the Spirit upon the Gentiles, just like the apostles received at Pentecost. That "heart cleansing" seemingly occurred before water baptism.
- 16:1-3 -- Timothy was from a Jewish mother and a Greek father. He had not been circumcised as an infant, but all the Jews in the region knew his mother was Jewish and that both his mother and grandmother had taught him the Scriptures from an early age. Paul took him and circumcised him for cultural reasons (become all things to the Jews in order to win them), not because it was essential for Timothy's salvation.
- 16:13 -- "went outside the gate to a riverside where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer ... women who had assembled" -- this was a part of the Jewish culture and customs not explicitly taught in Scripture, but Paul was aware of it and used it as an opportunity to preach the gospel to Jewish women. Very interesting, however, that Paul and Barnabas broke with some of the more strict Pharisaic traditions in teaching women without their husbands being present. Their husbands were probably all Gentiles. We think nothing of it today, but it must have been unusual in their culture, just like it was for Jesus to speak to the woman at the well in Samaria.
- 16:14-15 -- Lydia was not Jewish, but rather a Gentile "worshiper of God" (or "God-fearer"). As we would say in our culture today, "she was a God-seeker." Amazing how the gospel interacts with the culture to open hearts, like it did here for Lydia and her household. It is interesting that there are five cases of "household" baptisms in our New Testament, but not a single case of a teenager who had grown up in a Christian home

- being baptized when he reached the "age of accountability." I suspect there is a cultural principle at work here. [See other mentions of the God-fearers in Acts 17:17]
- 16:21 -- Paul and Silas were accused in Philippi of "proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans." This was a false charge, and was only manufactured because the slave-girl was no longer able to generate income for them by practicing divination (under demonic influence). There was nothing about the gospel which was unlawful for Romans. It only made them better Romans, law-abiding and honest. There was no Roman law against those things. This false accusation was economically motivated, like many of the economically-motivated machinations of the trade unions today. [See the similar culturally-motivated false accusations mentioned in Acts 17:7; 18:12-17; and especially in 19:23-41.]
- 16:37-39 -- When it was discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen, the situation changed dramatically. It is amazing to watch throughout the book of Acts how God used the wings of the Roman eagle to protect his people. Paul's Roman citizenship saved the day for him on many occasions, and gave him a free ticket to Rome to preach unhindered to Nero and the Praetorian guard. We should not hesitate to use all the legal means of culture to spread the gospel. (See other instances of this in Acts 22:24-29; 23:27 and 25:11).
- 17:16-34 -- Luke opens a window into the Athenian Greek culture for us here. We see the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers mentioned, along with their aversion to the idea of resurrection. The city was literally filled with idols, and in case they overlooked any, there was even one to the unknown god. The Athenians were always "inquiring minds" compulsively needing to "tell or hear something new." Paul used all these cultural situations as an opportunity to present the gospel. We should not hesitate to reach out to "seekers" and "inquiring minds" today.
- 18:1-4 -- Paul used his tent-making skills to connect with Aquila and Priscilla. They had recently come from Rome to Corinth because of Claudius commanding the Jews to leave Rome. Here again, Paul uses whatever culture or skills he possesses to "become all things to all men" in order to save some of them.
- 18:18 -- In Cenchrea Paul had his hair cut off, since he was keeping a vow. This was a Jewish custom based on the Law of Moses in Numbers 6:13-21. We see how Paul used this custom to the advantage of the gospel both here at the end of his second journey, as well as at the end of his third journey (Acts 21:24). He did not keep these jots and tittles for salvation sake, but rather for conscience sake, so that as a law-keeper he could preach to law-keepers. The Jews would never have listened to a law-breaker or a Gentile.
- 18:24 -- Apollos was "an Alexandrian by birth." This spoke volumes to first century folk, but the point is lost on modern readers. Alexandria in Egypt was founded by Alexander the Great, and was the capitol of the Ptolemies, one of whom hired seventy scholars from Israel to come to Alexandria and translate the Hebrew scriptures into Greek (the Septuagint). From that time onward, Alexandria became a huge cultural center, not just for Greek culture, but for Jewish learning as well. At this very time in Alexandria, Philo (the great syncretist of Judaism and Greek philosophy) was flourishing. Apollos grew up in a very rich Greco-Judaic philosophical and cultural environment, which was considered liberal and compromising by the Hebraic Jews in Palestine. The gospel was

extremely attractive to the Alexandrians, since it did not require circumcision and strict adherence to all the Mosaic customs and rituals.

19:11-20 -- Here we see how the light of the gospel pierced the dense, thick, demonic, and Satanic darkness of the Ephesians. Demon-possession and sorcery (magic) are mentioned here, but were only the more visible of the vices that ran rampant in that culture. The miraculous light of God flowed through Paul to enlighten this very dark place, so that many of the Ephesians forsook their witchcraft and sorcery and burned their magic books (worth fifty thousand pieces of silver). Writing material was expensive back in those days, and hiring a scribe to make a copy of a scroll was even more expensive. It was usually possible to wash off scrolls and reuse them (called "palimpsests"). But evidently this left traces of the former writing still visible, and Paul (along with all other Jews) was evidently not comfortable with such scrolls being reused and running the risk of someone reading the faint magical text and being influenced by it. Better to be safe and simply burn them. This was a very significant cultural and economic shift when they burned these magic books, in a number of ways. It would be like folks today completely trashing their TV's (which are such a strong source of unclean and ungodly influence in our culture today). Pretty radical shift in culture, but very necessary there in Ephesus.

21:17-36 -- It is amazing to see "how many thousands of Law-zealous Jewish believers" there were still entrenched in the church in Jerusalem at this late date (AD 58), almost thirty years after Pentecost! Evidently they had conceded that Gentiles could be saved without circumcision (after Acts 10 and Acts 15), but they were not willing for any Christian Jews to live law-free like the Gentiles. They adamantly insisted that all Jewish Christians, both inside Palestine and outside in the Diaspora continue keeping every jot and tittle of the Law. They were strictly following what Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-20, not realizing that it was destined to end soon when the Temple was demolished and the sacrificial system totally abolished. It was already fulfilled by the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. It was only continued to be practiced by Jewish Christians as a good testimony to their fellow Jews, so that fellow Jews would listen to the gospel coming from fellow law-abiding Jews. But these "Law-zealous" Jewish Christians in Jerusalem went beyond that, believing that continued practice of the Law was absolutely essential in every case. They demanded that all Jewish Christians (even outside in the Diaspora) continue to circumcise their children and keep all the customs of Moses, no exceptions. Paul recognized the importance of the principle of Jesus in Matt. 5:17-20, and adhered to it, but not for the same reasons as the Judaizers. His practice was "becoming all things to all men for the sake of the gospel." That meant that Jewish Christians could drop the customs of Moses if they wished, but it would be like renouncing their citizenship rights. They could not expect to have any further influence on their fellow Jews for the gospel sake. They would be looked on as being law-breakers. No Jew would listen to them. So, until the temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system was abolished in AD 70, it was expedient for the gospel sake to continue practicing the jots and tittles, so that Jews everywhere would be willing to listen to the gospel coming from fellow law-keepers. The Law was not kept for salvation sake (like the Judaizers insisted), but rather for the gospel sake (like Jesus and Paul both taught), so that the Jews could have "first right of refusal" on the gospel before the Temple was destroyed and their Old Covenant religion came to its "End of

Days" in AD 70. It was "to the Jews first" but not "to the Jews only." And it was only "to the Jews first" until the Temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system passed away. After that, the Gentiles were on equal footing with the Jews to receive the gospel, with no priority status to the Jews any longer.

- 21:37–22:5 -- Paul's bi-lingual capability (spoke both Greek and Hebrew/Aramaic) both saved his life and gained him a hearing for the gospel on numerous occasions, as it did here. This is a clear example of how God used Paul's cultural heritage to further the gospel. Speaking two languages (like Spanish and English) is a great door-opener for the gospel even today. Paul also was probably the most educated of all the apostles, "educated under Gamaliel strictly according to the Law." He personally knew "the High Priest and all the council." This gave him credentials that few rabbis outside of Israel could match. His educational assets opened doors for him in the Jewish Diaspora, to teach and preach where few other Jewish Christians could ever have gone (e.g. Mars Hill, school of Tyrannus, etc.). We can clearly see the Providence of God at work throughout Paul's life to equip him for the Mission to the Jewish Diaspora and the Gentiles.
- 22:21-22 -- As soon as Paul mentioned that Christ had sent him "far away to the Gentiles" they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live." The Roman commander, a Gentile, was baffled by this crowd reaction to Paul's statement about going to the Gentiles. Throughout the first century leading up to the Jewish revolt in AD 66, the Jews were backing away more and more from their entanglements with the Gentiles. In AD 66, the war was instigated when the priestly Zealot leader Eleazar b. Ananias banned all Gentile sacrifices and offerings from the temple. *At the very time when the Christians were embracing the Gentiles (through Apostle Paul's missionary efforts) and grafting them into the Church as fellow heirs of the Kingdom, the Jews in Palestine were severing all connections with the Gentiles and pushing them away from any of the benefits of Judaism.* Quite a contrast. We can see that anti-Gentile sentiment here at Paul's arrest in Jerusalem. The church today is comprised of a huge majority of Gentiles, but it was not that way in the first century. Paul literally risked his life to take the gospel "far away to the Gentiles" and those Jews in Jerusalem wanted make that risk reality.
- 23:6-10 -- At his trial before the Sanhedrin, Paul noticed that there were two opposing groups in the council (Pharisees and Sadducees). Paul followed the example of Jesus in using the beliefs of the Pharisees to put the Sadducees into confusion. The judicial proceedings against Paul were disrupted by the disagreement over the resurrection issue. The Roman commander had to swoop down (like an eagle) and pluck Paul out of the middle of that dissension. Here again we see Paul using his knowledge of Jewish customs and culture to protect himself from what the Jews wanted to do to him.
- 25:16 -- Festus explained the "custom of the Romans" in regard to treatment of people accused of crimes: "...it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges." In the American judicial system, this is referred to as "facing your accusers" and "innocent until proven guilty" and "due process" and the right to a fair trial. It is indeed amazing how God used the Romans and their excellent judicial system to providentially protect the apostles from their over-zealous Jewish persecutors.

- 25:27 -- Festus was concerned about sending Paul to Nero without indicating any significant charges against him. Indeed, Festus was putting himself at risk by sending someone for trial in Rome over trivial or frivolous charges. It was not just "absurd" to do something like that, it was dangerous to his career. Nero demoted and killed greater men than Festus for lesser reasons than that.
- 26:1 -- "Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense." This was a common gesture for speakers in Roman society. The editor for the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (ACCS) in his overview on Acts 26:1-8 said this about Paul's gesture and opening remarks to Agrippa: "...after making the gesture of an orator by stretching out his hand and giving a well thought-out *captatio benevolentiae* ("winning of good will")." Paul served as his own defense attorney, and followed Roman custom in dressing up his remarks honorably and appropriately to both Agrippa and Festus. There was no flattery here. Everything Paul said about Agrippa's knowledge of Jewish customs was true.
- 26:4-5 -- Paul said, "all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem, since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion." This may shed some light on his statement in his trial before High Priest Ananias and the Sanhedrin where he said, "I was not aware brethren, that he was high priest." Paul knew all these guys in the Sanhedrin for many years, especially the High Priest Ananias who had been high priest for six years already. So what did Paul mean by his statement that he was not "aware that he [Ananias] was High Priest"? Was he lying, or was he intimating something else far more profound? In view of his authorship of the book of Hebrews, where Jesus is clearly exalted as the High Priest of our faith, it seems clear now what Paul really meant: "I do not honor this law-breaking judge who sits in biased judgment over me and lawlessly orders an uncondemned man to be struck on the mouth. He is not the True High Priest. He is an imposter. Jesus is our true High Priest, the One who was raised from the dead, for Whom I am on trial. Furthermore, that true High Priest is about to strike this imposter down." Sure enough, Ananias was killed by one of the Zealot leaders (Menahem) right after the Jewish revolt began in AD 66 (merely eight years after Paul prophesied it).

It is utterly breathtaking to study the life of Paul and see how Christ worked around him, upon him, inside him, through him, and out of him to accomplish the incorporation of the Gentiles into the new spiritual Israel (the Church, the Eternal Kingdom). There is no other way to explain the success of that mission without the intimate involvement of Christ providentially and miraculously in every facet of his life. There were too many human obstacles and demonic powers set against him. Only Christ and his angels could have enabled him to succeed in that ministry, and Paul constantly recognizes that fact in all his letters, especially in these prison epistles. Every one of us preachers, teachers, and missionaries need to follow his example of complete trust and reliance upon Christ to carry us through every challenge that we face in our ministries. Only through firm reliance upon Christ will we ever be able to bear much fruit for the Kingdom like Paul and the other apostles did.

Recommended Reading on Jew-Gentile Unity

- Bockmuel, M. N. A. *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1990.
- Brown, R. E. *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968.
- Caragounis, Chrys C. *The Ephesian Mysterion: Meaning and Content*. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1977. Snodgrass: "...an investigation of the term *mystery*."
- Dahl, N. A. 'Gentiles, Christians, and Israelites in the Epistle to the Ephesians.' *Harvard Theological Review*, 79 (1986), pp. 31-39.
- Hanson, S. *The Unity of the Church in the New Testament: Colossians and Ephesians*. Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1946.
- Radar, William. *The Church and Racial Hostility: A History of Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11-22*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1978. Snodgrass: "This book provides a chronicle of the interpretation of 2:11-22 from the Apostolic Fathers right up to the modern period and brings this history into the modern discussion about race relations."

Appendix C – Jew-Gentile Unity

Jesus Set the Stage for His Kingdom

Title of this broadcast: *Transition Period (Intro)*

Then and Now -- By Ed Stevens -- Sept. 4, 2011

INTRODUCTION:

In coming weeks, we will get back into our study of the first century history leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. We will start in the book of Acts and work right on through the forty years of history down to the destruction of Jerusalem.

This is a study of what is called the Transition Period, covering the work of the apostles sent out by Jesus to call the Jews and All Nations into His Kingdom.

This is not just a raw historical study. We are not interested in merely knowing WHAT happened. We want to get behind the events to know WHY it happened the way it did, and HOW it transferred the Kingdom from the Jews to the whole world.

It is a historical-**redemptive** study, a historical-**cultural** study, a historical-**theological** study, and a historical-**philosophical** study, all wrapped up into one. This is called historical reconstruction. It is a contextualized study, because we are using the historical context to see how Christ actually established His Kingdom in the middle of history. It is forty years of history in a Jewish and Roman cultural context which unveils the Divine plan in action.

We do not learn much of value from historical study that is **divorced from its cultural, redemptive-theological, and worldview context**.

That is the whole purpose of our studies here on Then and Now. We want to **study the past, and learn from it, so that we can reshape our present and future life in the Kingdom**. But we cannot make the proper applications to our lives today until we know **what it MEANT to its original audience**.

We want to see how Christ accomplished all His redemptive and theological work inside history. We will see how Christ used the culture of the Jews and the Gentiles to provide the context for His world-changing, Kingdom-building work. It was a God-sized accomplishment to transform His Kingdom on earth from a one-nation enterprise into a global all-nation entity. It only took Him three years to train His twelve disciples for a forty-year mission, which they did accomplish.

We need to see all these events as part of a forty year Kingdom-transfer process, which Jesus supernaturally guided from start to finish.

Jesus and the Kingdom was not just about **Covenant**, although covenant was certainly a part of the Kingdom. Nor is the Kingdom merely about **circumcision and law**

keeping like some of the Jews thought. It was all about saving a people for His own possession.

In this lesson we want to see how Jesus laid the foundation for this transition in His short ministry of teaching and training His twelve Jewish disciples.

To prepare us for a study of the work of the Apostles in the Transition Period, we need to first look at the teaching of Christ regarding the Kingdom, and how it relates to the Law, to the Jews, to the Romans and other Gentiles, to the **Hellenists, Herodians, Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots, Essenes**, etc. We need to see this history through the eyes of Jesus first, before we look at it through the eyes of His apostles.

All these relationships that Jesus had with these different cultural groups reveal something about the Kingdom of God that He came to build. It is to our advantage to look closely at not only *WHAT* He says, but *WHY* He said it, in view of the impact it would have on the culture of the Jews, the Romans, and the Christians later.

Jesus kept the real law of Moses perfectly. He rejected some of the man-made traditions that had built up around the Law (as a protective fence to prevent breaking the real Law).

Jesus taught His disciples what kind of relationship they needed to maintain with the Law until this transition was complete:

Matt. 5:17 ¶ “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but **to fulfill**.

Matt. 5:18 “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, **not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished**.

Matt. 5:19 “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever **keeps and teaches *them***, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 5:20 ¶ “For I say to you that **unless your righteousness surpasses *that of the scribes and Pharisees***, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

This teaching was not given to the Jews in general, nor to the Gentiles. Nor was it to apply for all ages of the world. It was given specifically to His Jewish disciples to help them in their missionary work. Jesus knew that the Jews had first rights to hear the Gospel, but that they would never listen to the gospel coming from the mouth of law-breakers. Jesus knew that the Gospel could only reach Jews if it was preached to them by preachers who were living within a Law-keeping context. That is why the Jewish disciples had to continue keeping the Law (every jot and tittle of it) until it was all fulfilled and heaven and earth passed away.

The whole plan and how it would all develop inside history was not revealed at the beginning. In the book of Acts we see that world-wide Kingdom plan gradually unveiled piece by piece. The Jews had first crack at the gospel. Once it was established

solidly within the Jewish cultural context, then it could expand into the Samaritans and Gentile world.

It was to Peter that the Gentile mission was first revealed (Acts 10 - Cornelius). But Paul had already been converted and was in the process of being prepared for the Gentile outreach in a major way. Paul knew that the Gentiles would never accept the Gospel if they had to submit to circumcision and law-keeping. So he defended Gentile liberty with all his gusto. He knew the Temple system was about to end. There was no point in forcing that system upon the Gentiles for just one generation. Why bring them under bondage to something which the Jews found hard to bear, and which was destined to pass away shortly.

So the Gentiles were kept Law-free. But the Jewish Christians had to continue keeping every jot and tittle of the Law, better than the scribes and Pharisees (like James the Lord's brother did), so that there would be no excuse (no impediment, no roadblocks, no stumbling blocks) for the Jews to reject it. They would hear the gospel coming from folks who kept the Law better than they did. They would listen to that.

So, we can see that Jesus had the transition period all mapped out in advance. The proof of that is in his words here in Matt. 5:17-20. There are some other incidents in the life of Jesus which show that He had a plan to save not only the Jewish people, but all the nations as well. Let's look at some of these. As we look at these texts, try to imagine what Jesus had in mind when He said and did these things, and how it explains later events that we see happening during the transition period.

Simeon and Anna about Jesus: (see vv. 32, 34, and 38 especially)

Luke 2:29 “Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace,
According to Your word;

Luke 2:30 For my eyes have seen Your salvation,

Luke 2:31 Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

Luke 2:32 **A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES,**

And the glory of Your people Israel.”

Luke 2:33 ¶ And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him.

Luke 2:34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this *Child* is appointed for **the fall and rise of many in Israel**, and for a sign to be opposed —

Luke 2:35 and a sword will pierce even your own soul — to the end that **thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.**”

Luke 2:36 ¶ And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with *her* husband seven years after her marriage,

Luke 2:37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers.

Luke 2:38 At that very moment she came up and *began* giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were **looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.**

Came to seek and save the lost sheep of the House of Israel:

Matt. 10:6 but rather go to the **lost sheep** of the house of **Israel.**

Matt. 15:24 But He answered and said, “I was sent only to the **lost sheep** of the house of **Israel.**” [But look at the context up above]

Salvation is of the Jews (John 4:22)

John 4:22 “ You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for **salvation is from the Jews.**

The Limited Commission:

Matt. 10:5 ¶ These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “**Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans;**

Matt. 10:6 but rather **go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**

What was Jesus trying to point out to the Jews here? (they were no better than the Gentiles, and maybe even worse)

Matt. 23:2 saying: “ The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;

Matt. 23:3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say *things* and do not do *them.*

Matt. 23:4 “ They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with *so much as* a finger.

Matt. 23:5 “But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels *of their garments.*

Matt. 23:11 “ But the greatest among you shall be your servant.

Matt. 23:12 “ Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

Matt. 23:13 “ But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

Matt. 23:14 [“ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.]

Matt. 23:15 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

*****Matt. 23:23** “ **Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. [cf. Micah 6:8 below; Lk. 11:42]**

Matt. 23:24 “You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

Matt. 23:25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but **inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.**

Matt. 23:26 “You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.

Matt. 23:27 “ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like **whitewashed tombs** which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are **full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.**

Matt. 23:28 “So you, too, **outwardly appear righteous** to men, but **inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.**

Mic. 6:8 He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do **justice**, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

Jesus was helping the Jews realize that the kingdom is much more than just being circumcised and keeping a few outer rituals. He condemned the **mere outward Law keeping (without inward righteousness).** And He showed that the real basis of justification and salvation was the weightier matters (just like the prophet Micah had pointed out).

The Salvation of the Samaritans:

John 4:20 “ Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”

John 4:21 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

John 4:22 “ You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for **salvation is from the Jews.**

John 4:23 “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

John 4:24 “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

John 4:25 The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.”

John 4:26 Jesus said to her, “ I who speak to you am *He.*”

The Parable of the Good Samaritan sheds some light on the Kingdom plan of Christ.

His Healing of Gentiles hinted at His ultimate plan to save Gentiles:

Matt. 15:21 ¶ Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of **Tyre** and Sidon.

Matt. 15:22 And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and *began* to cry out, saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed.”

Matt. 15:23 But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, “Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us.”

Matt. 15:24 But He answered and said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Matt. 15:25 But she came and *began* to bow down before Him, saying, “Lord, help me!”

Matt. 15:26 And He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

Matt. 15:27 But she said, “Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

Matt. 15:28 Then Jesus said to her, “O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed at once.

Jesus further hints at Gentile salvation, but the apostles evidently assumed it would only be through circumcision and law keeping:

John 10:16 “I have **other sheep**, which are not of this **fold**; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd.

This statement of Jesus may have been in the mind of Paul when he wrote Eph. 4 about Jew-Gentile unity in the ONE Kingdom under ONE Savior.

All of these passages help us catch a glimpse of the Kingdom plan of Jesus.

What we will be looking at constantly in the coming studies of First Century history, is this struggle between the Jews and the Gentiles. From the beginning of the Church in Acts 2 until the early 60's, the BIG controversy within the Church was the relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles. The Judaizer controversy. The requirement of circumcision and law-keeping. This became a moot issue eventually when the temple was destroyed. But during the transition phase of the Kingdom, it was a huge issue that had to be carefully handled. That is the major cultural motif that we must constantly keep in mind as we look at the history. That struggle was involved in almost every major event throughout the period, and it was not fully resolved until near the end.

The apostles start the Transition Period (Acts 1) assuming that Gentiles have to be circumcised and keep the Law in order to gain eternal life.

Even in Acts 1-9, the thought never seems to occur to them that Gentiles could be saved without circumcision and law-keeping.

It also seems that they still had a very nationalistic concept of the Kingdom (Jewish supremacy).

Here Is What Christ Accomplished Through the Apostles:

- The wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile was broken down in the Church
- Unity in the bond of peace as fellow-citizens was achieved in the Church
- Made Disciples of Every Nation in the Diaspora (Roman-Persian world)
- Fully Grafted the Gentiles into the Olive Tree (Rom. 11)
- Brought the Church to the Unity of the Faith (Jew-Gentile oneness - Eph. 4)
- Texts which show that the gospel mission was accomplished by the apostles:
 - Rom. 1:8 (AD 57-58) -- "being proclaimed throughout the whole world"
 - Rom. 10:18 (AD 57-58) -- "their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world"
 - Rom. 15:19 (AD 57-58) -- "from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ"
 - Rom. 16:25-26 (AD 57-58) -- "the revelation of the mystery ... now is manifested ... [and] has been made known to all the nations"
 - Col. 1:5-6 (AD 62-63) -- "the gospel ...in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing"
 - Col. 1:23 (AD 62-63) -- "the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven"
 - 1 Tim. 3:16 (AD 63-64) -- "proclaimed among the nations"
 - 2 Tim. 4:7, 17 (AD 64) -- "I have fought the good fight, and I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" and "through me [Paul] the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear"
 - Jude 3 (AD 64) -- "once for all delivered to the saints"
- By the time of the Neronian persecution (AD 64), when the great tribulation began, all the Diaspora Jews had heard the gospel, and all the NT books had been written. Christ had kept them alive long enough to complete their mission. The seed of the Kingdom had been planted throughout the whole (Roman) world as Jesus had commanded them.
- They had kept all the jots and tittles to the very End of the Age (AD 70), so that the gospel would be attractive and lawful to the Jews. All of the Old Testament scriptures pertaining to the arrival of the Kingdom were now fulfilled, so that the Law could pass away. When the temple (where heaven and earth met) was destroyed, the jots and tittles of the Law could no longer be kept. It was all swept away when the stones of the temple were torn down (AD 70). It was the end of the road for Biblical Judaism, but only the beginning for the universal church of Christ.