

# Prophecy and Mystery

## *By Pastor Art Watkins*

Many people say the Bible is divided up between prophecy and mystery or between the prophecy books and the mystery books. They say the Old Testament books and the Four Gospels are the prophecy books and Paul's Epistles are the "mystery books". They say the doctrine found in the Old Testament books and the four Gospels were foretold by the prophets, but the doctrine in Paul's epistles was a mystery and a secret to the prophets. They say we must rightly divide between "prophecy and mystery" and we should never mix them together. They say the great error of the church today is mixing prophecy with mystery. They say if it's in the prophets it can't be a mystery and if it's a mystery it can't be in the prophets.

According to many dispensationalists a mystery is a secret because it is not written down prior to its revelation. They assume that if something is written down, it cannot be a secret or a mystery. They say much of what Paul preached and wrote about in his epistles was a mystery, which according to them, was never committed to writing before him. They say no one preached what Paul preached before him, because no one knew what Paul knew before him. And no one knew what Paul knew because it was not written down in the Old Testament or the four Gospels or even in Hebrews through Revelation.

These people have a problem and it's a simple one: They have a false definition of a mystery. To them a mystery in the Bible is something secret because it is not written down prior to its revelation. They assume that if something is written down it cannot be a secret or a mystery, for if it is written down everybody would see and know it. They say the mysteries Paul wrote about in his epistles could not be written down before him, for if they were they would not be a mystery or a secret.

This is wrong because a mystery in the Bible is not a secret because it is not written down prior to its revelation. There are many mysteries written down in the scriptures that remained a secret for years until God chose the right time, place and man to reveal them to. As a matter of fact, there are mysteries in the prophets and there are prophecies that were mysteries. This is something that many dispensationalists do not understand. They have a blind spot caused by a faulty definition of the word mystery. They

cannot see how something can be a prophecy and yet be a mystery and how a mystery can be in the prophets and even a prophecy.

**The gospel was a mystery and a prophecy.**

Compare: 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 Paul said this about the gospel: ***For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.***

In Romans 16:25 he said this about his gospel: ***Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began.***

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul said his gospel is in the Old Testament scriptures for he said, Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, but yet in Romans 16:25 he said it was a mystery kept secret since the world began. How can it be a mystery if it's written down in the prophets?

This is a puzzle to those who define a mystery as something never committed to writing before its revelation. But, the gospel Paul preached was a mystery and yet it is in the Old Testament prophets. For years dispensationalists have wrestled with this problem because they have a faulty definition of the word mystery. They define a mystery as something never written down prior to its revelation. They assume that if a doctrine is written down in the Old Testament or the Four Gospels it cannot be a mystery. But yet, we see Paul's gospel was a mystery, even though it was written down in the Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah 53.

The question people need ask is this: how can a doctrine like the gospel be a mystery if it is written down in the Old Testament? What kept it hidden and concealed from men if it is written down?

The answer:

Luke 18:31-34 says: ***Then he (Christ) took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.***

***For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on:***

***And they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.***

***And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.***

Did Christ tell the apostles he would die and be raised again? Yes. Was it prophesied he would die and be raised again? Yes. Verse 31 says it was written in the prophets just like Paul said it was in 1 Cor.15:3-4. Did the apostles understand it? No. Why? Because verse 34 says it was hid from them. Who hid it from them? God. What did he hide it from? Their understanding. They understood none of these things because it was hid from their understanding. The gospel concerning Christ's death was not a mystery to them because Christ did not say anything about it in the Four Gospels or because it was not written down in the Old Testament. Christ plainly told them he would die and be raised again and so did the prophets. It was a mystery to them because it was hidden from their understanding.

Now see Luke 24:44-46

***And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.***

***Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,***

***And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:***

What was hidden from them in Luke 18 was revealed to them in Luke 24. In Luke 24, they understood the Old Testament scriptures that foretold Christ's death and resurrection. Why? Because he opened their understanding that they might understand the scriptures. Their understanding was not opened in Luke 18 and that is why the gospel was a mystery and a secret to them. But once he opened their understanding, they could see it. It was no longer a mystery to them. They could see in Luke 24, what they were blind to in Luke 18.

This shows us that a mystery is not a secret because it is not written down in the Old Testament or the Four Gospels. The gospel was written down in the Old Testament and the Four Gospels, but remained a secret until God opened the understanding of the apostles to see it. So a mystery is not a mystery because it is not written down prior to its revelation. Many truths were written down in the Old Testament and the Four Gospels, but remained hidden from the understanding of men, until God chose the right time, place and man to reveal it to. The gospel is one of them.

The resurrection of the church was a mystery and a prophecy

1 Corinthians 15:50-55

*Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.*

*Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,*

*In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

*For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

*So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.*

*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

In these verses Paul reveals a mystery about the resurrection. In verse 51 Paul said; ***Behold I show you a mystery.*** The mystery is not the resurrection itself. The mystery is about what happens to those who are alive when the resurrection takes place. The mystery is; ***we shall not all sleep.*** What does this mean? It means some saints will be caught up without dying. They will never die. They will never suffer the sting of death. Prior to Paul, the common belief was all saints would be dead when Jesus came and only a resurrection of dead saints would take place. They didn't see or know that some saints would be alive when Jesus came and would never die. But, even though it was a mystery, it was written down in the prophets. In verses 54-55, Paul quotes Hosea 13:14 and Isaiah 25:8 who prophesied that some saints would enter into the kingdom of God without suffering the sting of death. They both said some saints would rob the grave of its victory. But, even though both Prophets prophesied of this event, no one really understood it prior to Paul. This is one of those mysteries written down in the Old Testament that remained a secret, until God revealed it fully to Paul. God revealed the mysteries of the Old Testament to the apostles. He opened their understanding to see the mysteries hidden in the Old Testament. What was hidden in the Old Testament was revealed to the apostles like Paul and that includes this mystery about the resurrection.

In the four gospels, no one knew or understood some saints would never die and would enter into the kingdom of God without first going through the grave yard.

In John 11 Lazarus the brother of Martha died and it says:

***Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.***

***But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.***

***Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.***

***Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.***

***Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:***

***And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11:21-26)***

In these verses, Martha shows us what she believed about resurrection. What she knew is what most people believed at that time. When the Lord said thy brother shall rise again, she said; I know he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. But, what the Lord said to her in verse 26 was a mystery to her. When the Lord said; ***whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die***, he was talking about those who will be alive at the resurrection of the last day. He said they will never die. She didn't answer that question because she did not understand it and neither did anyone because Paul said it was a mystery in 1 Corinthians 15:51.

What was a mystery to Martha and everyone in time past is now common knowledge to all saints. We all know and understand this mystery. We know when Christ comes again, those who are alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and will never die. They will never feel the sting of death. They will never end up in the funeral home. They will never be buried in a grave yard. No one will grieve their death. Their name will never appear in the obituary. The undertaker will not make a dime off them. No one will have to buy a coffin for them. No flowers will be sent to their grave for they will rob the grave of its victory. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet, they will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air without dying.

Even though the prophets prophesied that some would never die, it remained a mystery for many years from the understanding of men. When believers read Hosea 13:14 and Isaiah 25:8 they did not fully understand its meaning. But God opened the understanding of the apostles in the New

Testament like Paul and revealed its full meaning to us. This again shows us a mystery is not a mystery because it was not written down prior to its revelation. It is a mystery because God for his own reasons keeps it hidden from the understanding of men, until he chooses the right time, place and man to reveal it to. A man can preach prophesy and mystery at the same time.