

 **MYSTERIES OF THE BIBLE - Part II**

 “Mystery of the Church!”

A “mystery” in Scripture is a previously hidden truth now divinely revealed. Another of these Bible mysteries is the ***“mystery of the New Testament Church”*** **comprised of Jews and Gentiles.** The principle emphasis in the New Testament is on the church as an organism, a living union of all true believers in Christ. This is the distinctive truth that is presented beginning with the day of Pentecost, with the advent of the Spirit, and concluding with the coming of Christ for His church, in which the church will be caught up out of the world and taken to heaven.

- **The word *“Church”* is a translation of a Greek word *“ekklesia”* and is frequently used as any assembly or congregation of people, the word means, *“called out ones.”*** This word is used 115 times in the New Testament, mostly in the Book of Acts and the writings of the apostle Paul and the general epistles. At least 92 times this word refers to a local congregation. The other references are to the church general, or all believers everywhere for all ages.

## *#1 - Jesus Establishes the Church!*

In the four gospels of the New Testament, the term church is found only in **Matt 16:18** and **18:17.**

- Let’s read **Matthew 16:13-19**

**–** The Church is built upon the rock which is Peter’s confession ***“Thou*** ***art the Christ, the Son of the living God!”***

**(v18) Jesus establishes the foundation of the church** by saying, *“you are Peter,”* Peter in Greek is *Petros* which means a *small stone*, but *“upon this rock,”* the Greek word for **rock** is *Petra* which means *a massive rock*, **that massive rock is *Jesus, the Christ!*** The church will be built on this *Petra* and not upon the *Petros* (Peter) and the *gates of Hades will not prevail against it.* To understand Hades read Luke 16:19-31.

- ***Gates* are a symbol of authority, just as sin, death and devil are in authority here on earth.** Notice that ***the gates of Hades shall not prevail against the church,*** remember the word ***church*** is *ekklesia*, which means *“a called-out assembly.”* Christ has crashed the gates of Hades for believers; therefore sin, death, and the devil himself cannot hold us, defeat us, or destroy us. (Heb. 2:14-15)

**(v19) Jesus gives Peter, the apostles, and all believers keys to the *“kingdom of heaven.”***

A key is an instrument for opening a door. He that is in possession of it has the power of access and has a general care of a house. Hence, in the Bible, a key is used as a symbol of superintendence an emblem of power and authority. The phrase ***"to bind" and "to loose"*** was often used by the Jews. It meant to prohibit and to permit. To bind a thing was to forbid it; to loose it, to allow it to be done. When Jesus gave this power to the apostles, he meant that whatsoever they forbade in the church should have divine authority; whatever they permitted, or commanded, should also have divine authority-that is, should be bound or loosed in heaven, or meet the approbation of God.

**- The apostles were to be guided infallibly in the organization of the church:**

**(1) by the teaching of Christ, and, (2) by the teaching of the Holy Spirit.**

This does not refer to persons, but to things - "whatsoever," not whosoever. It refers to rites and ceremonies in the church. Such of the Jewish customs as they should forbid were to be forbidden, and such as they thought proper to permit were to be allowed. Such rites as they should appoint in the church were to have the force of divine authority. Accordingly, they commanded the Gentile converts to ***"abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood"*** (Acts 15:20); and, in general, they organized the church, and directed what was to be observed and what was to be avoided. The rules laid down by them in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles, in connection with the teachings of the Savior as recorded in the evangelists,

constitute the only law binding on Christians regarding the order of the church, and the rites and ceremonies to be observed in it. (from Barnes' Notes)

**- Next in Matthew 18:15-20; Jesus teaches church discipline -** *"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'**And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*

*"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. "Again I say**to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*

*-* ***The foundation of the church is based on three undeniable facts:***

**(1) The church was founded upon the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ!**

**(2) There could be no church until it was fully purchased with Christ's blood** (**Acts 20:28** - *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*).

**(3)** **Christ is the head of the Church** (**Ephesians 1:22-23** - *And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*)

# *#2 - Let’s Observe the “Mystery of the Church”*

 **- Let’s read Ephesians 3:1-12.**

**(This glorious mystery is that Jew and Gentile receive salvation through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 3:6 *that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel)***

**- Romans 16:25-27 -** *Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the* ***mystery*** *kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith — to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.*

**- Ephesians 6:19-20 -** *and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the* ***mystery*** *of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

**- Colossians 4:4 -** *Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the* ***mystery of Christ****, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.*

- The early church met in the Temple and Jewish synagogues, as well as private homes of believers -**Acts 5:42 - *And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.***

**- Later, in recognition of Christ's resurrection the church began to meet on the first day of the week, Sunday became the principal time for public worship and the gathering of saints for the Word of God (1 Cor 16:2).**

**Jason Meyer in his book, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology,*** *“*But some claim that a mandate by Constantine in A.D. 321 “changed” the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. On what day did the early church meet for worship? Scripture never mentions any Sabbath (Saturday) gatherings by believers for fellowship or worship. However, there are clear passages that

mention the first day of the week. For instance, [**Acts 20:7**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2020.7) **states that *“on the first day of the week we came together to break bread.”*** **In** [**1 Corinthians 16:2**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor%2016.2) **Paul urges the Corinthian believers *“on the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.”***

Since Paul designates this offering as “service” in [2 Corinthians 9:12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Cor%209.12), this collection must have been linked with the Sunday worship service of the Christian assembly. Historically Sunday, not Saturday, was the normal meeting day for Christians in the church, **and its practice dates to the first century.”**

**Paul writes regarding Old Testament laws in Colossians 2:16-**17 - ***“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ”*** The Jewish Sabbath was abolished at the cross where Christ ***“canceled the written code, with its regulations”*** ([Colossians 2:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col%202.14)).

**This idea is repeated more than once in the New Testament: *“One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord”* (**[**Romans 14:5–6a**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom%2014.5%E2%80%936a)**).**

***“But now that you know God — or rather are known by God — how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years”* (**[**Galatians 4:9–10**](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gal%204.9%E2%80%9310)**).**

# *#3 - The Church is Comprised of Jews & Gentiles*

**- C.I. Scofield writes,** “That Gentiles were to be saved was no mystery (**Rom. 9:24-33; 10:19-21**). The mystery “hidden in God” was the divine purpose to make of Jew and Gentile a wholly new thing –“the church, which is His [Christ’s] body,” formed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit (**1 Cor. 12:12-13**) and in which the earthly distinction of Jew and Gentile disappears (**Eph. 2:14-15; Col. 3:10-11**). The revelation of this “mystery” of the Church was foretold but not explained by Christ (**Mt. 16:18**). The details concerning the doctrine, position, walk, and destiny of the Church were committed to Paul and his fellow “apostles and prophets: by the Spirit,” (**Eph. 3:5**).”

**- To the Jews -** **God’s eternal promises to this people cannot be altered. These promises include a national entity (Jer. 31:36), a land (Gen. 13:15), a throne (2 Sam. 7:13), a king (Jer. 33:20-21), and a kingdom (2 Sam. 7:16).**

- Four words describe the outworking of the divine purpose in the Jewish people – ***“chosen, scattered, gathered, blessed.”*** The peculiar ministry of the Jewish people is stated in **Romans 9:3-5 - *For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.***

**- To the Gentiles –** They are an unnumbered company, excluding the Israelites, who have lived on the earth from Adam until now. Prophecies of the Old Testament predict great earthly blessings to come upon the Gentiles in the yet future kingdom on the earth, and in the present age they partake alike with the Jews in the privileges of the Gospel. (Matthew 13:1-23; Rom. Ch. 9, 10 & 11; Eph. 2:11-21).

# *#4 – What is our Church Commission?*

- Speaking to His followers after His resurrection, Jesus commissioned the church to make disciples and teach them what He had taught (**Matt 28:16 - *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.***

**-** The entire ***Book of Acts*** is the story of the early church's struggle to be loyal to this commission. As one reads this book, he is impressed by the reality that Christ, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, continues to direct His church as it carries out its commission.

**- In the worship services of early Christians, a pattern of church practice was set by the Holy Spirit according Acts 2:42-47, whereas they:**

**(1) *studied the apostle’s doctrine*;**

**(2) *fellowshipped*;**

**(3) *broke bread* (1 Cor 11:20-29);**

**(4) *prayed*;**

**(5) *praised God from house to house*;**

**(6) *served one another*;**

**(7) *the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved!***

- With the ***“Great Commission”*** comes **church organization**. At first, church organization was flexible to meet changing needs. As the church became more established, however, church officers came into existence.

- **Turn to Ephesians 4:11-16.** Church leadership is to ***equip the saints for the work of the ministry*** (i.e.- Soul winning, discipleship, leadership, missions - local and global).

- **The church is not on a world improvement program but rather to fulfill** **Acts 1:8 - *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."***