

Sunday, March 18, 2012—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 61 When Was the Mystery No Longer a Mystery? Advancements in Pauline Truth through 1870, Part 2

Introduction/Review

- In Lesson 60 we started to survey the historical development of a clear mid-Acts dispensational position. The chronology we are in the middle of tracing, significantly challenges commonly held views as to the historical resurgence of Pauline truth. Please consider the following citations from *The Berean Searchlight*.
 - “Later Mr. John N. Darby and Dr. C.I. Scofield were raised up to recover ‘that blessed hope’ and related truths. . . This writer well remembers the days when the ‘Darby-Scofield Movement’ had gotten under way. . .” (Stam, *The Berean Searchlight*, Jan. 1988)
 - “These (the Huguenots) were followed by devout men of God like J.N. Darby who recovered the truth of the premillennial rapture. C.I. Scofield built upon this by uncovering the dispensational approach to Scripture. Then God raised up Pastor J.C. O’Hair who took a giant step in teaching us how to rightly divide the Word of Truth. He showed us that there is a difference between Prophecy and the Mystery. He was followed by Pastors Stam, Baker, Elifson, and others who were used of the Lord to bring order out of chaos. Pastor Stam was largely responsible for systematically putting the message together and working out many of the problem areas.” (Sadler, *The Berean Searchlight*, May 1989)
 - “The Huguenots were followed by devout men of God like J.N. Darby who as we have said, recovered the truth of the pretribulation Rapture. C.I. Scofield built upon this by uncovering the dispensational approach to the Scriptures. Later, God raised up Pastor J.C. O’Hair who took a giant step in teaching men how to rightly divide the Word of Truth. He was instrumental in showing the Church the great distinction between *Prophecy* and *Mystery*.

Today, we stand upon the shoulders of giants who have retrieved for us the glorious truths of the pretribulation Rapture.” (Sadler, *The Berean Searchlight*, Jan. 1991)
- Not only is much of the information in the statements quoted above historically incorrect, it is indicative of an institutional approach to church history, as we discussed in Lesson 60. It is the contention of the *Grace History Project* that significant advancements in the resurgence of Pauline truth were made by the generations immediately following JND. In fact, these advancements were such that it can be proven that the major tenants of the mid-Acts position can be observed in print by 1870 and for sure by 1900.
- This massive resurgence in mid-Acts Pauline dispensationalism is best understood by observing a process of generational refinement. For example, JND articulated many of the fundamental viewpoints utilized by the mid-Acts position. Building upon the shoulders of Darby’s work, subsequent generations were able to restore major elements of the mid-Acts position. This lesson is the second step in uncovering this exciting, rewarding, edifying, and overlooked history.
- The simplest way to trace the historical development of mid-Acts Pauline dispensationalism is to consider the emerging understanding of “the mystery” doctrine found in Roman 16, Ephesians 3,

and Colossians 1. Once “the mystery” was understood as a unique Pauline revelation it was only a matter of time before the Acts 2 position was no longer sustainable for those striving for doctrinal consistency.

- Thus far we have observed clear doctrinal development in the following printed works:
 - 1828 American Study Bible
 - John Nelson Darby’s *The Rapture of the Saints and the Character of the Jewish Remnant*
 - William Trotter’s “Christ and the Church” in *Plain Papers on Prophetic and Other Subjects* 1850-1853?
- In this lesson we will consider the remarkable work of Richard Holden and prove that the mid-Acts position was known and in print by the year 1870 -- some 60 to 70 years before the time of O’Hair.

Richard Holden’s *The Mystery, the Special Mission of the Apostle Paul, The Key to the Present Dispensation, 1870*

- In 1870, a member of the Plymouth Brethren named Richard Holden published *The Mystery, the Special Mission of the Apostle Paul, the Key to the Present Dispensation*. (Allen, 47; Penney, 302) This work was anonymously republished in the Brethren magazine *The Christian’s Friend* in 1876, with the following abbreviated title, “The Mystery: Ephesians 3.” An analysis of this book shows clear progression and refinement in the resurgence of Pauline truth making it possibly the earliest **known** articulation of the mid-Acts dispensational position in print.
- From the opening paragraphs the reader is presented with a mature understanding of the unique commission of the Apostle Paul. Holden writes,
 - “There were two objects embraced in Paul’s ministry. He has expressed them in verses 8 and 9 (Eph. 3) of this chapter, where he states in brief and plain terms the character of his commission as an apostle or evangelizer.

First, the grace was bestowed upon him of his being sent to preach among the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ.

The emphasis here is on the fact of the Gentiles being those to whom he was specially commissioned. . . A richer and fuller exhibition of these unsearchable riches there certainly was in Paul’s ministry; but otherwise the specialty of the grace given unto him lay in his being selected to preach them “among the Gentiles.”

The second branch of the apostle’s commission, was that expressed in the words, ‘To make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery.’

There is here, I apprehend, an intended contrast between the ‘all’ and the ‘Gentiles’ of the preceding verse. Jew and Gentile were alike indebted to Paul’s ministry for the knowledge and intelligence of a ‘mystery’ unveiled through him, and which he was specially commissioned to make all see.”

- According to Holden, the vast majority of Christians are ignorant of Paul’s commission and the Reformers said nothing about it, thereby leaving it for later generations to exhume.

- “To many it will seem a bold or even a rash assertion, that to the vast majority of Christians, learned and unlearned, this side of the apostle's commission has remained to this hour without effect. The Reformation (great and blessed work of God as it was, for which we cannot be too grateful), while it brought once more into light much of ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ’ that had become encrusted with the corrosions of Popish error, left this side of truth wholly in darkness; and it has been reserved, in God's inscrutable wisdom, to a later day, and to ‘a feeble folk,’ to exhume from the word the long-buried treasure. . .

It is no disparagement of the Reformation, to say that it brought back only a part of the long-lost truths of the Word. It was pure sovereign grace that led men so far into truth as they did then go; as it is pure sovereign grace that has in these latter times, through other instrumentality, directed the minds of numbers of God's children to other truths in the Word not then discerned.”

- Holden’s work includes a lengthy discussion of the Greek word *oikonomia*, which he defines as “house law,” i.e., “the law, rules, regulations, or administration, of a household.” After surveying all the passages in which *oikonomia* and its sister word *oikonomos* appear, Holden offers the following definition of dispensational truth, “. . . it looks at the world as a great house hold or stewardly, in which God is dispensing, or administering, according to rule of His own establishing, and in whose order He has from time to time introduced certain changes, the understanding of which is consequently needful, both to the intelligent interpretation of His word and to intelligent action under Him.” Holden illustrates this point by comparing the household of a godly man with that of a godless man in which two female servants trade places. “In order to her becoming a faithful and profitable servant in the godly household, she must first acquaint herself with its order or ‘economy,’ and then conform herself to that. . . Even a change in the circumstances of the same household will necessitate sometimes a change in its rule, and demand therefore a corresponding change in the conduct of its servants.” Based on these premises, Holden concludes that God is a dispensationalist and that the only prayer mankind has to understand Scripture is to rightly divide the word of truth.
 - “Now surely it is just as simple and plain, that if God has, from time to time, introduced changes into the order of His dealing with the world, and dispensing its affairs, the nature of these changes must be studied, understood, and acted on by His servants, if they would prove profitable servants, and co-operate intelligently in His plans. To import into one dispensation the directions or conduct prescribed for another must entail confusion and disorder, whether in the interpretation of the Scriptures relating to them, or in the regulation of action, individual or corporate, under them. **Hence the necessity of what the apostle (2 Tim. 2: 15) calls "rightly dividing the word of truth," the neglect of which has ever been and ever must be the source of unutterable confusion; in short, of most of the confusion we see around.**”
- Speaking about the dispensation of the law Holden wrote:
 - “That dispensation closed at the cross; and subsequently a thorough and universal change was introduced, constituting the dispensation under which we now are, called in this passage ‘the dispensation of the mystery,’ and in verse 2 declared to be a ‘dispensation of the grace of God.’

- Just as Moses was “the divinely-appointed instructor” during the dispensation of the law, Paul is the divinely appointed instructor for the current dispensation of grace, according to Holden. Holden goes on to plainly state that the reason there is so much confusion in Christendom is because of the general ignorance of the mystery.
 - “To ‘make all see what is the dispensation,’ or, in other words, to be the divinely-appointed instructor in the character and order of the present time, as Moses was in that of the dispensation of ‘law,’ is that special feature in the commission of Paul, in which it was distinct from that of the other apostles.

If then it shall appear that, far from seeing what is ‘the dispensation of the mystery,’ the mass of Christians have entirely missed it, and, as the natural consequence have almost completely misunderstood Christianity, importing into it the things proper to another dispensation, and so confounding Judaism and Christianity in an inexpressible jumble; surely it is matter for deep humiliation before God, and for earnest, prayerful effort to retrieve, with God's help, this important and neglected teaching.”

- Holden is also explicitly clear about the connection between the words “revelation” and “mystery” in Ephesians 3.
 - “Let the reader then observe, first of all, that Paul claims to have had the truth in question given to him ‘by revelation’ (v. 3). Now the word ‘revelation’ means unveiling or uncovering, and its used in Scripture to signify the communication, by God, of truth not previously known, or, up to that time shrouded under veil of secrecy. The fact therefore, that the apostle claims for the truth he speaks of in this chapter, the character of ‘a revelation,’ ought itself to prepare us for the discovery, in his teaching of somewhat not to be met with in any previous portions of the word of God.

Next, be it observed, he calls it a ‘mystery,’ or secret, which secret he insists on with repetition and emphasis, as entirely hidden till given to him to tell out. Thus in verses 3 and 5, by revelation of God made known to him the mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed; and so in verse 9, ‘the mystery which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God.’ Language could hardly be more explicit than this. A secret which had not in other ages been made known to men, but from the beginning of the world had been hid in God, is now made known to the apostle by revelation.

. . . To other ages (or generations) it was not made known; from (the) ages and (the) generations it has been hid—hid from the beginning of the world, hid in God, kept secret since the world began. I know of no truth in the whole range of the word to which the testimony is more explicit and unmistakable, and I trust the reader will be prepared, in view of it, to set it down as a point of certainty, that whatever ‘the mystery’ may be, it is something quite unknown until the day of Paul.

If the reader has now fully bowed to the Word on this point, he will at once perceive that to look for an unfolding of this mystery in the pages of the Old Testament must be a hopeless and deceptive proceeding. For any man to imagine he finds there that which the Holy Ghost so expressly declares was hidden—an unrevealed secret—when that book was written; must be to follow a will-o’-the-wisp, that will lure him into the quagmire of misinterpretation and confusion. Let the reader keep this point in memory; it will meet us

again when we have advanced our enquiry another stage, examining next into the subject of the mystery itself.”

- Holden defined the mystery as the church the body of Christ and argues that the essence of the mystery is encapsulated in the following three points:
 1. “That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs.
 2. That they should be one body
 3. That they should be partakers or co-partners of God’s promise in the Messiah

In other words, the Church or assembly of God as distinguished alike from the a Jewish assembly and from the kingdom.

For this thing, the Church of God, or for any one of these three features of that which distinguishes it most markedly, as well from all that has gone before, as from all that will follow after, the reader will search in vain throughout the pages of the Old Testament.

This then is “the mystery”; the Church of God. . .”

- Holden also demonstrates an astute awareness of the word “church.” Anticipating possible objections, Holden writes that the “church” spoken of by Paul is not the same church Stephen spoke of in Acts 7:38. Holden’s comments on this matter sound like one of the main arguments utilized by Vernon A. Schutz in his book *The Three Bible Churches*.
 - “‘But,’ the reader may say, ‘surely the Church is spoken of in the Old Testament;’ does not Stephen affirm it in Acts 7:35, where he speaks of “the Church in the wilderness?”

That Stephen uses the word ‘Church,’ and applies it to Israel as found in the wilderness, is beyond a question; just as certain as that the Holy Ghost employs it in Acts 19:41, and applies it to the idolatrous rabble gathered into the theatre of Ephesus; of whom, after they had spent two hours in shouting ‘Great is Diana of the Ephesians,’ it is said, ‘He dismissed the church.’ The employment of the word church or ecclesia in these cases no more implies that the one assemblage was the Church of God than the other.”

- Regarding the first key point of the mystery, “that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs,” is nowhere found in the Old Testament Holden writes:
 - “The broad statement in this, as in the other points, is that of Gentile equality with the Jew. . . And such is the highest position of the Gentile in the prophecies of the Old Testament; he is to share in the benefits of Israel’s inherited blessing, but is never lifted into the position of a co-heir—never made Israel’s peer.

(After a lengthy exposition of Isa. 60:3-16, Holden concludes) . . . but still it is of Zion or Israel that they are spoken, and the Gentile is there exhibited as coming to her light to be blessed, and finding his blessing in ministering to her; as might happen where the servant of a master who has come into a rich estate, might share in the benefit of his master’s improved circumstances, though not himself a co-heir with him in his inheritance. Israel is to inherit the Gentiles (Isa. 54:3); but the Gentile is not to inherit Israel.”

- Without specifically using the phrase “time past,” Holden contrasts Paul’s comments about Israel being “one body” with the Gentiles with numerous passages from the Old Testament prophets where God clearly distinguished between these two groups of people. God’s reconciling both unto himself in one body is the second aspect of the mystery, according to Holden.
 - “Did my reader ever detect, in the course of this study of Moses and the prophets, anything that looked like this? Most surely not. If there is one thing more evident than another in the Hebrew Scriptures, it is the steadily–maintained distinction between Israel and the nations, from first to last; under the glory of the future as under the vicissitudes of the past. The welding of Israel and the nations into one body, form which their nationalities shall disappear; all distinctive autonomies be lost; is a thought as foreign to the ancient oracles as heaven is to earth. Take any of the Scriptures that refer to the Messiah’s reign and the blessings that are to attend it; the nations and Israel will ever be found in separation.

(After using Psalm 72, Isaiah 2, 11, and Zechariah 14 as examples Holden states) . . . Everywhere it is the same: Israel and the nations in their respective places, in most telling contrast with what the apostle insists on as distinctive of the present order of things, wherein (Col. 3:11) ‘there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all.’”
- Regarding the third aspect of the mystery, that the Gentiles are “co-partners in God’s promise in the Messiah,” Holden wrote.
 - “If there is any one thing that excites the ire of the Jew, it is the claim of the Gentile to an equal share with himself in the Messiah. He laughs to scorn the Gentile pretension to show from the prophets that such a thing should be; and he does so triumphantly; it is not there; and to pretend to it is to weaken under pretence of strengthening the Christian cause. God has said it is not there; to profess to find it is to pervert His truth, and must lead to the confusion of him who attempts it. Intimations of Israel’s failure and their rejection there are; predictions of blessing to the Gentiles under Israel, and in connection with the Messiah, abound, as in the Scriptures that have already been before us; but a co-partnership, anything like the equality of privilege in the Messiah that the gospel has introduced, and we ourselves at this moment enjoy, will be sought in vain.
- If the mystery of the church of God is not found in the Old Testament then what is found therein? According to Holden, the Old Testament is taken up with the subject of the establishment of the kingdom.
 - “But if there is indeed no mention of the mystery—the Church of God—in the Old Testament Scriptures, of what then is there mention? I answer, of the Kingdom.

A reign of righteousness and peace under the kingship of the Messiah. Zion, the seat of rule. Israel, a people of peculiar nearness and special privilege, with the nations grouped around this center, in their subordinate places; blessed in Israel’s blessing, in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed. Such is the future depicted by the prophets, alluded to in the New Testament (Acts 3:19-21), as ‘times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord,’ ‘the times of the restitution of all things.’ This and this only is the theme of the prophets of old. A state of things with which the present dispensation in now wise corresponds, at almost any point. A state of things the world has not yet seen.”

- “Have, then, the prophecies failed? By no means. So certainly as these are foretold, so surely will they one day come to pass,” so writes Holden in a lengthy section where he discusses what happened to the kingdom. Holden understood that during the earthly ministry of Christ, Israel’s long-prophesied kingdom was announced as being at hand, and had Israel accepted her Messiah, the prophetic promises of the Old Testament would have been accomplished. In the following astounding section, Holden addresses how the revelation of the mystery took Satan by complete surprise to the undoing of his entire plan of evil.
 - “To Satan, for whom, be it borne in mind, the counsels of God are as secret, until revealed, as to the children of men, it must have appeared a marvelous triumph of his ingenuity and devilish craft, when he had succeeded, to appearance, in overturning the plans and giving the lie to the prophetic teaching of God, by securing the rejection and crucifixion of God’s king. . . The revelation of ‘the mystery,’ unfolded in vain before the eyes of God’s children, has been seen of him (Satan) with clearer discernment. Nor let the reader consider this as mere conjecture; it is the teaching of the Word itself. (quotes Eph. 3:9-10) Here we have the fact that the display of God’s manifold wisdom, by means of the church, was a fore-contemplated object of creation, and that, with express reference to ‘the principalities and powers in heavenly places.’ Now, if in Eph. 1:21 and Col. 2:10, ‘principalities and powers’ seem employed to designate celestial inhabitants, in favor with God; in Eph. 6:12, the same is used for the deadly enemies of God and man, the wicked spirits known elsewhere as ‘the devil and his angels;’ by whom this manifold wisdom will be learned to their confusion and dismay, as by the others to their edification and joy, through the demonstration of God’s ability to accomplish results, the highest and most blessed, through the instrumentality of the very elements that seem most to thwart his plans and traverse his purposes.

. . . No; Satan has not triumphed. God’s purpose is not foregone. God’s plans have suffered no frustration. A postponement, but a foreseen one, has delayed the immediate establishment; but, in his seeming victory the prince of darkness has outwitted himself, has wrought out God’s secret purpose, to suspend for a season the erection of the throne, in order to the preparation of a bride for His King, to be associated with Him in His reign—the Church of the living God—an otherwise unknown thing; a people brought into a special place of nearness; who, owning and taking part with Him in his humiliation and rejection, shall also have part in His exaltation and glory; who, because they ‘suffer with Him, shall also reign with Him;’ filling that very place in the heavenlies, in which Satan and his angels now are—those powers of the air of which he is prince, the ‘wicked spirits in the heavenlies, against whom, as the opposers of her blessing, the Church, in her individual members, has now to contend in spiritual conflict (Eph. 6:12). No; the prophecies spoke only of earth; there was in these no intimation of a people to fill the place of the Satanic powers, no word of their being dispossessed in favor of a people redeemed from the earth. This was a secret, a mystery hid in God, which Satan’s seeming triumph gave occasion both to the unfolding and to the accomplishment of, to his own utter and eternal confusion, and to the display of God’s multiform wisdom, His grace and His glory; and the kingdom, the kingdom which Satan thought to frustrate, will yet be set up on earth—the millennium of New Testament prophecy—to the literal accomplishment of every detail of God’s word, and the full vindication of the faithfulness of God and the truthfulness of His prophets.

The present dispensation is, then, an interregnum or parenthetic period, contemplated indeed in the counsels of God, but not revealed till given to Paul, as set forth.

Once this truth is seen, it becomes the key to the interpretation of Scripture and to the ‘rightly dividing the word of truth,’ in the sundering of things Jewish from things Christian. Until this is seen neither Testament can be understood aright; and Christianity, instead of having its proper and distinctive character, is degraded into a sort of bastard Judaism.”

- Holden writes that instead of seeing Christianity as something taught exclusively by Paul, the church has viewed Christianity as the flowering of the bud of Judaism and has blended things Jewish with things Christian resulting in the entire misunderstanding of the Christian dispensation.
 - But they did not ‘see what is the dispensation of the mystery;’ and because they did not, they have also left us, in their chapter-headings, a monument of the inevitable consequences of ignorance of this cardinal truth. In common with all the divines of their day, they took up the erroneous notion that Christianity, instead of being, as taught by Paul, a distinct thing, and a previously unrevealed secret, was but the foretold outcome - the regular and anticipated development of what had preceded - the full-blown flower from the bud of Judaism. Of the parenthetic or interregal character of the dispensation, they had not a conception. That the Church of God was a thing so distinct and peculiar, in respect of all that had gone before, as to be quite unknown to prophecy was a thought to which they were wholly strangers - a thought so foreign to their minds, that, taking for granted that Christianity and the Church must be there, they turned to the Old Testament scriptures, with the deliberate purpose therein to discover it. The natural result of a research for what was not, under the control of a foregone conclusion that it was, is easy to anticipate. They must of necessity misapply to it what belonged to something else; and accordingly, the prophetic announcements concerning Israel and ‘the kingdom,’ are made to do duty on behalf of the Church; with the necessary consequence, in their own and all minds that have followed in their wake; of an entire misunderstanding of the Christian dispensation, no less than of the millennial dispensation, yet to follow - a blending of things Jewish with things Christian, to the lowering of the entire character of ‘the heavenly calling,’ and a misapplication, throughout, of the truth of God.”
- Holden even understood that the revelation of the mystery filled up or completed the word of God.
 - “If all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in ‘the mystery;’ so that the dispensation of it, as given to Paul, is the filling up, or completing, of the word of God, as stated in verse 25 of the previous chapter; then it is self-evident, that where ‘the mystery’ is not understood, the key to the understanding of the Word, is not in the hand; and ‘the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,’ though fully revealed of God, must remain locked.”
- Holden says Israel’s hope was to be **with God** in the wilderness, in the land, and ultimately in the kingdom. In contrast, the “hope of glory” for the body of Christ is Christ **in his people**.
 - “The hope of the Church is ‘the hope of glory.’ Israel's hope, in the wilderness, was the hope of the land. (Deut. 12: 8.) Their hope, in the future, is still the land, under the kingdom, in the millennial blessedness. If there is glory connected with it, as there certainly is (Isa. 4, etc.), it is still earthly glory - glory in the earth. The Church's glory, on the contrary, is celestial glory - the glory of God and of Christ. ‘The glory which thou hast given me I have given them;’ ‘I will that they also, which thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory.’

Israel's hope of promised blessing rested on the presence of Jehovah *with* them in the pillar of cloud and of fire. (quotes Ex. 33:14, 16; Num. 14:14, Deut. 4:7)

Jehovah, with and among them, in a symbolical presence, was thus the glory of Israel's position in the midst of the nations of the earth, and the guarantee, on which their hope of the promised inheritance reposed.

The riches, or wealth, of the glory of 'the mystery' is, Christ in His people, the hope of glory. (Col. 1: 27.)

Great as was Israel's privilege, in having Jehovah so nigh to them, as never to any other people or nation; their pledge of a land flowing with milk and honey; that glory is eclipsed, by the overflowing abundance - the wealth of glory, pertaining to the pilgrim Church of God, in the dispensation of the mystery; which glory, is personal union with a risen, exalted, and divine Head, as members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones - a union which is to them the unfailing guarantee and basis, of that hope of glory which is set before them, as the goal toward which they journey onward. Well may the apostle term this a 'wealth of glory' - a glory veiled indeed from carnal and unbelieving eyes; so that 'the world knoweth us not, because it knew not Him;' but how real and how unspeakably precious, to him to whose faith and experience it is known! Well might he, in comparison of Israel's glory, say 'Even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory which excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.'

'Christ in you, the hope of glory!' Do our souls enter into it? Does our faith lay hold on the fulness of its riches? Does the glory fill our eye and satisfy our hearts, till all earthly glory pales beneath its brightness? What an inheritance is ours - glory! - 'an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God.' This is much. To be kept by power, and that the power of God, is strong, and sure, and precious; but there is more. The thought before us goes beyond it. It is more than being kept; it is union, oneness, with the Keeper. 'He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit;' 'by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body;' 'members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.' And this is the peculiar, the excelling glory, of 'the mystery;' and we, by grace, have our portion in it. Surely, for such a portion, we would praise and bless 'the God of all grace, who hath called us to His eternal glory, by Christ Jesus.'"

- Holden, like Trotter before him, understood much about the nature of the dispensation of the fullness of times. Holden viewed this dispensation as the heavenly side of the mystery. The truth of the dispensation of the fullness of times was not "another mystery but another phase, or more advanced stage of the same great secret," according to Holden.
 - "These thoughts lead us upward, to what may be called the heavenly side of the mystery; to which we are introduced in Eph. 1: 9: (quotes Eph. 1:9-10). This is not another mystery, but another phase, or a more advanced stage, of the same great secret.

The third chapter, which, along with Colossians, has mainly occupied us thus far, introduces us only to the present or earthly side of the mystery - to the Church, in her pilgrim character, as journeying towards her inheritance, in the dispensation called by the

Holy Ghost ‘the dispensation of the mystery;’ as that, to which the unfolding and development of the truths of the mystery, gives tone and character.

Here we are introduced to another, and yet future, dispensation; equally secret to the by-gone ages, **but now** brought forth, as the complement of the uncovered mystery - to wit, the union, under the sceptre of the Messiah, of heavenly as well as earthly things in one kingdom of God. This coming dispensation is termed that of the fulness of times or seasons, as that in which the dealings of God with this earth (to which times and seasons, *kronoi kai kairoi*, belong) will attain their completion; and that which characterises it is the gathering together - literally, the heading up - of all things in heaven and on earth in the Christ. The language is peculiar, and strikingly impressive, this heading up. Has the reader ever seen a cooper ‘heading up’ a cask? He groups the staves together on end, around the head of the cask, fitted into the ‘chime’ or groove, cut in each to enable it to receive and grasp the beveled edge of the head. When all are in position, he tightens a hoop around, and drives on hoop after hoop, till all the separate pieces are firmly compacted into one vessel. Did he drive the hoops on the upright staves, without the head, the first stroke of the hammer would cast all into confusion. The centre of cohesion, around which the staves are headed up, is the head or end of the cask; and once that is in place, the greater the compression, the firmer and better the work.

Christ is the centre and head, in whom are to be headed up all the separate elements, both heavenly and earthly, whose union, under the hand and sceptre of the Messiah, like that of the union of Jew and Gentile in one, under the present dispensation, was wholly foreign to the scope of Old Testament revelations.”

- Holden even seems to have understood some things about the unity of the spirit and the one baptism of Ephesians 4 as being spiritual in nature. He explicitly mentions how the body is being formed by “one spirit” through whom all believers are baptized into one body. Therefore the unity of the body is derived from the fact that it has been tempered together by Christ.
 - “If God has revealed to us, that the order and plan of the dispensation in which He has set us is that Christ should, by His death, not only save our souls, but should ‘gather together IN ONE the children of God that were scattered abroad,’ so that there should be ‘ONE FLOCK and one Shepherd’ (John 11: 52, John 10: 16); that in reconciling men to Himself, by the cross from among Jews and Gentiles, it was His will that this should be effected, not as scattered units, as in former ages, but that those so reconciled, should be found in unity – ‘in one body’ (Eph. 2: 16); that this ‘body,’ of His divine purpose, *has been* formed by the ‘one Spirit,’ by whom all are baptized into it (1 Cor. 12: 13); that He ‘has tempered the body together,’ and ‘has set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him’ (1 Cor. 12: 18, 24), in order that the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, should make increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love’ (Eph. 4: 16); and that, for this reason, His will is ‘that there should be no schism in the body.’ (1 Cor. 12: 25.) If, I say, such is the revealed mind and will of God, as concerning ourselves, and the dispensation under which He has placed us, then clearly all action on our part that does not conform to this truth, and has not this principle as its basis, must be in contravention of His plans and in opposition to His will, and therefore SIN. . .

Now God has both revealed to us the fact, and enjoined on us the conduct befitting us, as arising out of the fact. He will have us to ‘walk worthy of the vocation where with we are

called' (Eph. 4: 1); and inasmuch as we are not only called with a holy and heavenly calling, but are 'called in one body' (Col. 3: 15); accordingly, among the instructions in detail, which follow, a most prominent position is given to the duty of 'endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;' and this, as arising out of the truth, that there is one body and one Spirit, even as the hope of our calling (the glory) is one, and unity characterizes all that pertains distinctively to it – 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.'

To act then in any manner contrary to this divinely formed unity, is to walk unworthily of the vocation where with we are called; and to set oneself in opposition to the whole order and plan of the dispensation; the very thing the entire Church of God has been doing for centuries. What doctrine, in all the range of truth, has been so trampled under foot - so daringly and systematically set aside, as unity? "

Concluding Remarks on William Holden

- The depth of understanding Holden displays is mind boggling. Reading Holden is like reading J.C. O'Hair, C.R. Stam, or Charles F. Baker 60 or 70 years before anyone is supposed to have understood these doctrines according to the standard historical understanding we have functioned under. Richard Holden was a mid-Acts dispensationalist 60 to 70 before that descriptor came into usage. He articulates all the core principles of the mid-Acts position.
- First, Holden never says that the church started in Acts 2.
- Second, Holden defines the mystery as the church of God.
- Third, he describes the church of God as the unique situation in which Jews and Gentiles have been: 1) made fellow-heirs, 2) made one body, 3) made partakers of God's promise in Christ (Israel's Messiah) by the gospel.
- Fourth, this mystery i.e., God's plan for forming the church the body of Christ was kept secret since the world began and was therefore unknown prior to the time of Paul. Therefore the church could not be formed until the mystery was revealed to the Apostle Paul.
- Fifth, Holden states, "In the coming of the Messiah there was a real and perfectly consistent offer to Israel of the long-protphesied kingdom; an offer which, had it been accepted, would have led to the immediate accomplishment of the promises, in the introduction of His glorious reign." This offer of the kingdom is extended into the early Acts period beyond Acts 2. In the following statement, Holden views the fundamental distinction of time past between Israel and the Gentiles as still being in force in Acts 3, "A reign of righteousness and peace under the kingship of the Messiah. Zion, the seat of rule. Israel, a people of peculiar nearness and special privilege, with the nations grouped around this centre, in their subordinate places; blessed in Israel's blessing, in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed. Such is the future depicted by the prophets, alluded to in the New Testament (Acts 3: 19-21), as 'times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord,' 'the times of the restitution of all things.' This and this only is the theme of the prophets of old. A state of things with which the present dispensation in no wise corresponds, at almost any point. A state of things the world has not yet seen." According to Holden, Acts 3 is describing a state "with which the present dispensation in no wise corresponds," therefore, the current dispensation could not have begun in Acts 2.

- Sixth, Holden does not extend the dispensational boundary to Acts 28:28, nor does he differentiate between the Acts and post-Acts epistles of Paul. Instead, as the following quote testifies, Holden viewed the revelation of the mystery originating with Paul and encompassing the entire Pauline era: “. . . that whatever ‘the mystery’ may be, it is something quite unknown **until the day of Paul**. . . The present dispensation is, then, an interregnum or parenthetic period, contemplated indeed in the counsels of God, but not revealed **till ‘given’ to Paul**.” Michael Penny, author of *Approaching the Bible*, states the following regarding Holden’s view of the mystery and the place of the Pauline Epistles, “Instead of limiting the revelation of this mystery and the start of this dispensation until after Acts 28:28 and the giving of Ephesians, Holden widens it to embrace Paul’s day. That is, all Paul’s letters are seen to be directly for this dispensation.” (Penny, 210)
- Conclusion, what would you call someone who held the following doctrinal positions?
 - Does not teach implicitly or explicitly that the church began in Acts 2.
 - Viewed the kingdom as still being offered to Israel in Acts 3.
 - Did not start the dispensation of Grace in Acts 28 or differentiate between the Acts and post-Acts Epistles.
 - Defined the mystery as the revelation of the church the body of Christ.
 - Taught that the mystery was not revealed until it was given to Paul and that it included the entire “**day of Paul**.”
 - Taught that the body of Christ will one day occupy the positions of governmental authority in the heavenly places currently occupied by the principalities and powers with whom they currently wrestle.
 - Knew that the church was not spiritual Israel but an entirely separate and distinct entity.
 - Taught that the revelation of the mystery fulfilled and completed the word of God.
 - Understood that the “hope of glory” for the church was Christ being formed in the believer.
 - Saw the dispensation of the fullness of times as a yet future dispensation in which all things in heaven and earth would be centered in Jesus Christ.
 - Understood that unity of the spirit contained only one baptism and that believers were placed into the one body by the spiritual baptism of the one spirit.
 - Taught that God was a dispensationalist and that the source of all the confusion in Christendom stemmed from a failure to rightly divide the word of truth.
- I WOULD CALL SUCH A PERSON A MID-ACTS DISPENSATIONLIST. RICHARD HOLDEN WAS A MID-ACTS DISPENSATIONALIST 60-70 YEARS BEFORE THERE WAS A FORMAL CLASSIFICATION FOR THE BELIEFS HE ARTICULATED.

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