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"Preaching grace in the Dispensation of grace"  
A Bible Study

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### THE MYSTERY OF PRAYER

By Richard Jordan

How clearly I can still hear those words from the lips of that dear lady! I was attending a YMCA contention in my home town. We had been assigned to groups of ten, with an adult advisor for each. One evening as we discussed the subject of prayer, our instructor burst into a heartbroken sob and told us not to get our hopes up too high because, *"It just doesn't work like the verse says it does."*

The verse was Matt.21:22: "And all things, what so ever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

What a heartbreak to see this woman--and there are thousands like her--crushed under the weight of claiming God's Word by faith and then having it fail! But what joy to be able to whisper into her ear the answer--that while Matt. 21:22 is indeed God's Word, it was not God's Word to her.

The vast majority of believers today have great inner fears about their prayers. They hear the exciting testimonies of "successful" prayer warriors who give illustration after illustration of personal triumphs in prayer. They hear--and they fear. For when they apply the offered "success formula" it only confirms what their heart feared all along--"it won't work forma." Confusion and bitterness are often the result.

The basic fallacy in modern-day prayer preaching and prayer practice comes from a failure to rightly divide the Word of Truth--the claiming of prayer promises that have nothing to do with the dispensation in which we live, but belong rather to a program which God Himself has interrupted and is temporarily holding in abeyance.

The answer to the seeming mystery of prayer is the mystery revealed through the Apostle Paul. Indeed, no one had better say that the matter of prayer is a simple one who fails to recognize the distinctive ministry and message committed to Paul.

The prophetic program called for the blessings of God to go to the Gentiles through Israel, Abraham's seed (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:17,18, etc.). When our Lord appeared He took up the theme of the prophets, proclaiming to Israel, "*Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matt. 4: 17), and going "about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing (*A clear foretaste of the blessings of the Kingdom. See Isa.35; 33:24, Jer 30:17, etc.*) all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Matt.4:23; cf. 9:35, etc.). All this because, as Rom. 15:8 says, "Jesus Christ was a minister of the Circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers."

The Twelve Apostles were trained and sent out to preach this same message (Matt. 10:1-8). After the resurrection their ministry was enlarged (Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47, Acts 1:8), but not changed.

Still the blessings were to go to the nations through Israel, Abraham's seed. Thus Peter declares to them;

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

"And He shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you:"

"Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

"Unto you first God, having raised up His son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:19,20,25,26).

It is not until after the stoning of Stephen that the record gives any indication of a change in the established program. And how things do begin to change with the salvation of Saul of Tarsus! Our ascended Lord not only reached down and saved His chief enemy, but also made him His chosen vessel to carry a hitherto hidden message of grace to a rebellious world. Salvation--not through Israel's rise to Kingdom glory, but rather in spite of her rebellion, indeed, *through her fall--was* now to be sent to all alike (Rom.11:11, 30-32).

The prophetic program has been set aside for a time and the unprophesied "*dispensation of the grace of God*" has replaced it. Today the Kingdom program is held in abeyance--temporarily suspended--while God is forming the Body of Christ. With this change in program, Israel and her program are set aside, replaced by the mystery committed to us through the ministry of Paul (Eph.3:1-9).

Our ascended Lord gave to Paul--and through him to us--the very secret of His will, the "eternal purpose" kept secret from before the foundation of the world! As I Cor.2:7 declares,

"...we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory."

What a glorious calling believers have today! What a shame to fail to appreciate it by failing to recognize and practice our standing in grace! Nowhere is this made clearer than where the subject of prayer is concerned.

How a recognition of the mystery affects our prayer lives--and that for the good! Rather than trying to force the Kingdom promise in Matt. 21:22 to work today, how much better it is to practice Rom. 8:26-28! Instead of wondering why John 14:13,14 does not "work" in our situation today, how much more blessed to apply Phil. 4:6,7! Instead of developing "theological gimmicks" as excuses when Mark 11:22-24 does not work for us, how much more reassuring to rest in Eph. 3:20, 21!

These verses really fit today. They are God's Word to us--so they work for us today!

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## WALKING WITH GOD

By Richard Jordan

Enoch is one of the most remarkable characters in the Bible. He lived in a notoriously wicked period of history one that in many ways parallels our own "present evil age." The fact that he "walk with God" makes his life and career of special interest to every sincere student of the Word of God.

## A WALK OF FAITH

The whole of Genesis 5 is a reproof of the restless ambitions of fallen man as it attaches to even these centuries--long lives the fact, "*and he died.*" The only exception to be found, amazingly enough, comes in the account of the *shortest* life in the chapter, for Enoch is the only break in the funeral train recorded here. The basic facts are these:

"And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah:

"And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters:

"And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years:

"And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Gen. 5:21-24).

Everyone knows that *"Enoch walked with God"* but many seem to overlook the fact that this began *"after he begat Methuselah."* Clearly the birth of Methuselah was a watershed experience in Enoch's life, the significance of which is no doubt embodied in the meaning of his name: *"When he is dead it shall be sent."* That the *"it"* is a reference to the coming judgment of the flood seems apparent and that this knowledge was given to Enoch as a special revelation for his day is equally certain.

Enoch was divinely instructed; he heard God, for *"faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God"* (Rom. 10:17); and Enoch clearly believed God, for it was *"by faith...he had this testimony, that he pleased God"* (Heb. 11:5). His was a walk of faith--a life in which the Word of God was as a real power.

Amos 3:3 asks the question, *"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"* and the prophet goes on to say:

*"surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets"* (Amos 3:7).

To Enoch God revealed the solemn fact that with the death of Methuselah His judgment would be poured out and thus it was as a prophet that he named his son.

It is simple matter to note that the deluge did come at the death of Methuselah: Methuselah was 187 years old at the birth of Lamech (Gen. 5:25), Lamech was 182 years old when Noah was born (5:28) and the Lord came when Noah was 600 years old (7:11). Adding up these figures we get exactly 969 years--the age of Methuselah at his death (5:27).

Thus we learn why Methuselah lived so long. Rather than immediately pouring out His judgment on an ungodly world, *"the longsuffering of God waited"* (1 Pet. 3:20) and thus as Methuselah's life was drawn out to become the oldest man of all time, it was a demonstration of God's longsuffering.

Not only did Enoch name his son by faith, but his daily life was a walk of faith:

*"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God"* (Heb. 11:5).

We should not overlook the fact that it was *"by faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death."* God had also revealed to him that he would not personally endure the coming judgment and thus he lived daily with that *"blessed hope"* before him. It was this *walk* of faith that led to the *witness* of faith held forth by Enoch. Thus *"before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God"* as he proclaimed His Word to his generation.

**A WITNESS FOR GOD**

The Word of God was a real power working in Enoch's life and it produced a vigorous witness for the truth committed to his trust. Jude 14,15 tells us of his ministry and message as God's spokesman:

"And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints,

"To execute Judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all that are ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

"By faith Enoch was a witness for God, living a life well pleasing to Him as the Word of God worked effectually in his heart and life.

### THE LESSON FOR US

There is much in Enoch's walk with God to instruct us today for we too have been given a special revelation from God--one that focuses on the delay of His judgment on ungodly men and that assures our translation prior to its ultimate pouring out. (*A revelation, of course, found in God's written Word*)

At Pentecost the stage was set for the day of God's wrath to begin. The prophets of the Old Testament had long and clearly predicted that God would judge the world for its rejection of His Christ. Peter recognized this as quoting Psalms 110:1, he warned his hearers on the day of Pentecost: "For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, SIT THOU ON MY RIGHT HAND, "UNTIL I MAKE THY FOES THY FOOTSTOOL.

"THEREFORE LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL KNOW ASSUREDLY, THAT GOD HATH MADE THAT SAME JESUS, WHOM YE HAVE CRUCIFIED, BOTH LORD AND CHRIST" (Acts 2:34-36).

The rejected Christ had ascended to the Father's right hand and the next scheduled event on God's program was for Him to make Christ's enemies His footstool. Yet the predicted and expected wrath did not come, Something amazing took place which the prophets had never uttered nor even know. God interjected into the prophetic scheme a *whole new dispensation*, a whole new order of things, a new divine administration!

Delaying the judgments He had predicted God ushered in a period of grace, based solely on the merits of His crucified, risen Son. And just as surely as "the dispensation of the grace of God" was hidden from the prophets, so surely was it first revealed to and through the Apostle Paul:

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

"If ye have heard of THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH IS GIVEN ME to you-ward:

"HOW THAT BY REVELATION HE MADE KNON UNTO ME THE MYSTERY..." (Eph. 3:1-3).

"Whereof I am made a minister, ACCORDING TO THE DISPENSATION OF GOD WHICH IS GIVEN TO ME FOR YOU, TO FULFILL (i.e., complete)THE WORD OF GOD;

"EVEN THE MYSTERY WHICH HATH BEEN HID FROM AGES AND FROM GENERATIONS, BUT NOW IS MADE MANIFEST TO HIS SAINTS" (Col. 1:25,26).

It is an astonishing fact that "this present evil age" is also an age of grace--a fact that emphasizes the true character of grace. It is also a testimony to the infinite mercy and longsuffering of God that this age of grace has lasted longer than any other. This "longsuffering" is by no means slackness on God's part. It is the very opposite, for God is containing and restraining His wrath and pouring out His grace instead. Peter, speaking of the delay in Christ's return to judge and reign, says:

"The Lord is NOT slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness: but is LONGSUFFERING to us-ward, NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH, BUT THAT ALL SHOULD COME TO REPENTANCE.

"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is SALVATION; EVEN AS OUR BELOVED BROTHER PAUL ALSO ACCORDING TO THE WSDOM GIVEN UNTO HIM HATH WRITTEN UNTO YOU" (2 Pet. 3:9,15).

Today, the longsuffering of our lord spells one wonderful word..SALVATION! Just as the longsuffering of God waiting in the days of Noah was symbolized by Methuselah, Paul tell us:

"Howbeit FOR THIS CAUSE I obtained mercy, that IN ME FIRST Jesus Christ might shew forth ALL LONGSUFFERING, FOR A PATTERN to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting" (I Tim. 1:16).

Like Enoch, we have a special revelation of the longsuffering of God committed to our trust--and we have the promise of deliverance from "the wrath to come" as we wait for the day when he will take us to be with Him.

How long this longsuffering will last no one can tell, for there are no signs to mark the time of its termination-- except, of course, the removal of the Body of Christ. Thus our opportunity to "hold forth the Word of life" becomes our urgent responsibility to "redeem the time, for the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16). May we, like Enoch, walk with God--following the path of faith, intelligently understanding just

where we stand in God's program, and witnessing faithfully for Him until He comes for us.

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