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C0442 -- October 27, 2004 – Ephesians 3:5b-6 – Twelve Mysteries of the New Testament

Greek Text 3:5b hos nun apekalupsthe tois hagiois apostolois autoi kai prophetais en pneumati,

Translation 3:5b as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit,

hos nun apekalupsthe, “as it has now been revealed” is a highly debated phrase. It is typically taken two ways.

1) comparison of degree or 2) comparison of kind

If you say this is a comparison of degree (view 1) then there are two ways you could possibly understand this: (a) *Covenant Theology* say that the **mystery** was partially revealed in the OT but not fully revealed until the NT or (b) *Progressive Dispensationalists* say it was revealed in the OT but not recognized until the NT. If you say this is a comparison of kind (view 2) then there is only one way to understand this: (a) *Classic Dispensationalists* say that the **mystery** was totally unrevealed in the OT. The Classic Dispensational view that Paul is making a comparison of kind is the best view for at least four reasons. *First*, the context argues that this **mystery** was totally unrevealed. For example, in v. 9 Paul says the **mystery** was hidden in God. It doesn't say it was partially hidden in God and partially revealed in the OT (which would be required for Covenant Theology). Nor does it say it was hidden in the OT and just not recognized (which would be required for Progressive Dispensationalism). Instead, it says it was hidden in God. And God's mind is inscrutable until He reveals His thoughts to us. *Second*, the verbs *apokalupto* and *gnorizo* in the prior context of v. 3 refer to something being unveiled and made known. If something were hidden in God then the only way it could be unveiled and made known is if God reveals it. *Third*, the adverb *nun* (now) in v. 5 argues that Paul is contrasting the past with the present and this is consistent with Paul's usage of *nun* in two other mystery

passages; Romans 16:25-26 and Col. 1:26. *Further*, if the heavenly hosts of v. 10 did not know of the mystery in the OT then it is highly unlikely that anyone on earth knew about the mystery. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that this ‘mystery’ was not known previous to Paul’s generation because it was not revealed. In fact, we find out in v. 10 that the heavenly hosts learn about the ‘mystery’ from the Church which began on the day of Pentecost. So, it couldn’t be known before Pentecost. So, a mystery is something that is totally unrevealed in the OT and is now revealed. To whom was the mystery first revealed??

tois hagiois apostolois autoi kai prophetais en pneumati, “to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit,”. We already know from 2:20 who the **holy apostles and prophets** are. They refer to those men in the NT who held the office of apostle or were prophets. These two groups were the only men in the NT to receive direct revelation from God. This fits perfectly with the **mystery** concept as well as the ‘unveiling’ and ‘being made known’ and ‘hidden in God’ concepts in the context. It is important to note that the revelation of the mystery was not solely given to Paul. Those who are Pauline Dispensationalists often try to assert that Paul was the only one given this revelation or that he was the first to have received the revelation. The plurals of **apostle and prophet** show that this is not correct. Other **apostles and prophets** did receive revelation of the **mystery** although it may have taken some time to think over and understand. Because Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, he had a great desire to make known this insight to the Gentiles. It is remarkable that Gentiles no longer have to become Jews but that by believing in Christ they become a part of one new body, neither Jew nor Gentile. This is truly important for Gentiles to understand. They don’t have to be circumcised and go through all the ritual of the OT to become fully accepted among Israel (this is the argument of Galatians). Finally, how was the mystery made known? Paul tells us he received the revelation of the **mystery...by the Spirit**. This shows conclusively that the **mystery** could not be known by human study or meditation on the OT Scriptures. It had to be revealed **by the Spirit**.

Finally, we come to the long-awaited content of the mystery. What exactly was totally unknown in the OT and is now made known in the NT era? This of course is highly debated so it will make things easier if we determine ahead of time what was revealed in the OT about Gentiles.

We know that Gentiles would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). We know that there could be Gentile inclusion within Israel (Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:18-19; 1 Kgs. 8:41-43). We know that Gentiles could be saved because the OT gives evidence of their salvation. We also know that Gentiles were prophesied to be blessed with Israel (Isa. 2:1-

4; 11:10; 49:6; 60:1-3; 61:5-6; Jer. 3:17; Zech. 8:20-23; 14:16-19). But these prophecies were referring to the future kingdom (cf. Acts 3:18-20). What we do not ever find in the OT is the concept of Jew and Gentile in the same body. This was an entirely new concept in the NT. Two distinct features of this body are found in 1 Cor. 12:13; (1) that entrance into this body for Jews and Gentiles is the same and (2) that this entrance is by baptism of the Spirit. Since Spirit baptism began on the day of Pentecost then it follows that these truths were a total mystery in the OT, something unrevealed now revealed to the NT **apostles and prophets** for our benefit and that of the heavenly hosts (3:10).

c. The Content of the Mystery (3:6)

Greek Text 3:6 einai ta ethne sugkleronoma kai sussoma kai summetocha tes epaggelias en Christo Iesou dia tou euaggeliou,

Translation 3:6 that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow participants of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

einai ta ethne sugkleronoma kai sussoma, “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body”. The significant thing about this verse is Paul’s focus on the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers. To accomplish this emphasis Paul used three adjectives prefixed by *sun-*. You’ll notice how the NASB translators maintained this by using the word **fellow** each time Paul used one of these adjectives. We are **fellow heirs, fellow members, and fellow participants**. This emphasizes unity! Believing **Gentiles** are **fellow heirs** with believing Jews **and** believing **Gentiles** are **fellow members of the body**. The **body** here is, of course, the **body** of Christ, that is, the Church (Eph. 1:22-23). Each individual believer depends on the other members and the whole body depends on Christ for growth and direction. We are being grown into a holy temple (2:21) and being fitted together to be the place where God dwells in the Spirit (2:22). Additionally, we are...

kai summetocha tes epaggelias, “and fellow participants of the promise”. What exactly is **the promise** that Paul has in mind? Paul mentioned that we were **strangers to the covenants of promise** in 2:12. There he was referring to the unconditional covenants (Abrahamic, Land, Davidic, and New). We must then be related to the unconditional covenants of the OT in some way(s). The ultimate promise that we participate in is receiving “eternal life” **in Christ Jesus through the gospel**. Since Jesus Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant then we partake of the spiritual aspects of the unconditional promises that are repeated in the NT. This includes the Messiah, salvation, and enablement of the Holy Spirit. We know from Galatians that Gentiles are Abraham’s offspring and we

are heirs according to promise. We know from 2 Cor. 3 that believing Jews and Gentiles are both under the spiritual blessings of the new covenant.

We have to be very careful here not to make Gentile believers a part of Israel. There are very careful distinctions that one must make when trying to understand what applies strictly to Israel and what applies to the Church. There are basically three different views. (1) Some take all the promises of the OT covenants allegorically and apply them to the Church in the present day (Roman Catholicism, Covenant Amillennial, and Covenant Postmillennial). (2) Some believe that the spiritual promises are to be taken literally and the physical promises are to be allegorized. On what basis can we allegorize some parts of a covenant and take other parts literally? All aspects of the unconditional covenants will be fulfilled literally. If they are not then God's character is at stake. (3) Some take all aspects of the covenants of promise literally. However, the only aspects of the covenants of promise that apply to the Church are those repeated in NT contexts related to the Church. All aspects that are not repeated to the Church are yet to be fulfilled to the nation of Israel at the Second Coming. This third understanding is the best and takes all of Scripture at face value which is a Dispensational distinction. There is simply no way we can allegorize Israel's land promises or the Davidic throne promises and apply them to the Church.

en Christo Iesou dia tou euaggeliou, "in Christ Jesus through the gospel". In Christ Jesus gives us the sphere in which Gentiles are **fellow heirs, fellow members, and fellow participants**. If it wasn't for Christ Jesus we would still be far off, strangers, aliens, excluded from the privileges of Israel; but now in Christ we who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ to the spiritual aspects of the unconditional covenants. The means by which this was made possible is **through the gospel**. The **gospel** refers to the "good news" of Christ's substitutionary death, His burial, His resurrection and ascension. All of which have been mentioned in Ephesians (cf. 1:20-22). If you only believe in Christ then you will enjoy the privileged position of being in God's household, the Church.

Tonight, I want to look at an extremely challenging study, but one I hope you will find interesting and enlightening. We're going to look at the 12 mysteries of the NT. And I've tried to organize these in a logical order of presentation so we can get the best understanding of the "mystery" doctrines in the NT. By way of review let's establish the definition of "mystery", the Greek word *musterion*. The word is used 28 times in the NT (Matt. 13:11; Mk. 4:11; Lk. 8:10; Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1 Co. 2:1, 7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; Eph. 1:9; 3:3f, 9; 5:32; 6:19; Col. 1:26f; 2:2; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:9, 16; Rev. 1:20;

10:7; 17:5, 7) and 8 times in the canonical books of the LXX, all of which are in Daniel 2 (Dan. 2:18f, 27ff, 47).

- 1) A ‘mystery’ was not hidden in the OT writings but in God and therefore inaccessible by humans (Eph. 3:9).
- 2) Therefore, a ‘mystery’ is something that could not be discovered by human study or intelligence until revealed by God (Rom. 11:25).
- 3) God revealed the mysteries through Christ to His disciples (Matt. 13) and the Holy Spirit to the NT apostles and prophets (e.g., Eph. 3:3, 5).
- 4) Apostles and prophets preserved the mysteries in writing.
- 5) The mysteries are for all believers in Christ Jesus and are to be understood (Col. 2:2-3).

A ‘mystery’ therefore refers to something previously unrevealed but now revealed by God.

Of the 28 NT references 12 refer to some particular ‘mystery’ and the other references refer to the proclamation of the mysteries (1 Cor. 4:1; Rom. 16:25, 26; Col. 4:3, 4), the nature of the mysteries (1 Cor. 2:7, 8; Rom. 16:25, 26), the place of the mysteries in the Christian life (1 Cor. 13:2), or the fulfillment of the mysteries (Rev. 10:7). As I said before, the mysteries are to be comprehended (Col. 2:2-3) but they are advanced doctrines, not milk doctrines (1 Cor. 2:1, 6, 7). One may understand them to a greater or lesser degree. I’m going to try to teach them in the clearest manner possible but keep in mind that they are advanced doctrines.

12 NEW TESTAMENT “MYSTERIES”

10 DIVINE AND 2 SATANIC MYSTERIES

(THINGS PREVIOUSLY UNREVEALED BUT NOW REVEALED)

Matthew 13:11

Mark 4:11

Luke 8:10

“New Truths Regarding the Kingdom of Heaven/God”

Romans 11:25

1 Timothy 3:9, 16

Colossians 1:27

Ephesians 3:3-9

Ephesians 5:32

“Partial Hardening of Israel Until Fullness of Gentiles”

“Mystery of Faith and Godliness”

“Christ in you”

“Believing Jews and Gentiles are Co-Equals in One New Body, the Church”

“Church as the Bride of Christ”

Revelation 1:20	“Seven Stars and Seven Lampstands”
2 Thessalonians 2:6, 7	“Mystery of Wickedness”
1 Corinthians 15:51	“Rapture of Church Saints”
Revelation 10:7	“Mystery of the 21 Tribulation Judgments Fulfilled”
Revelation 17:5, 7	“Babylon the Great, Mother of Harlots and Abominations”
Ephesians 1:9	“God Will Bring Together All Things and Restore the Whole Creation Under One Head”

MYSTERY 1

“NEW TRUTHS REGARDING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN/GOD”

Matthew 13:11 = Mark 4:11= Luke 8:10

Matthew 13:11 "To you it has been granted to know the *mysteries of the kingdom of heaven*, but to them it has not been granted.

Mark 4:11 "To you has been given the *mystery of the kingdom of God*, but those who are outside get everything in parables,

Luke 8:10 To you it has been granted to know the *mysteries of the kingdom of God*, but to the rest *it is* in parables,

GIVE BACKGROUND OF MATTHEW’S GOSPEL

Dispensationalists have been slippery on the 8 parables of Matthew 13. The traditional dispensational view (Scofield, Fruchtenbaum, etc.) is that the “mystery” here is a new ‘form’ of the kingdom beginning with Israel’s rejection of Jesus as Messiah (Matt. 12) and ending with Israel’s acceptance of Jesus as Messiah at the end of the Tribulation.

Kingdom Offered to Israel	Kingdom Rejected by Israel	Church 	Rapture 	Second Coming
MYSTERY	‘FORM’	OF	KINGDOM	MILLENNIUM
Matt. 1-11	Matt. 12	Matt. 13		

They say it is a spiritual ‘form’ of the kingdom. However, it is important to note that Jesus does not say a new ‘form’ of the kingdom is being introduced in Matthew 13. If we admit that this is a new ‘form’ of the kingdom then on what basis can we say that the kingdom

John the Baptist and Jesus offered earlier was not a “spiritual form” of the kingdom (cf. 3:2; 4:17)? What stops us from saying that there is no future earthly kingdom because the kingdom is solely spiritual? Why did Jesus separate the coming of the Holy Spirit from the coming of the Kingdom in Acts 1:5-8? Why is Peter still looking for the Kingdom in Acts 3:20-21 if the Kingdom was already there in a spiritual form? This approach creates confusion and is a clear departure from literal interpretation.

What then are the 8 parables of Matthew 13 teaching? First, only six of these parables are related to the Kingdom of God/heaven (Parables 2-7). The first and last parables are not Kingdom parables. The first parable is an introduction to the seven following parables and the last parable is an application of the Kingdom parables. The six parables in the middle are all Kingdom parables as signaled by the introduction of each one by a phrase like “the kingdom of heaven is like...”. It is best to understand the phrase “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” to refer to new truths regarding the kingdom of heaven. Since ‘kingdom of heaven’ has been used consistently throughout Matthew as referring to the earthly Davidic Kingdom then this reference must also be speaking of that same earthly Davidic Kingdom. These are new truths associated with the earthly Davidic Kingdom. The primary teaching is that, in view of Israel’s rejection of Jesus as Messiah “a whole new age will intervene; this age is not the kingdom but precedes it. This is a totally new teaching and gives good meaning to each of the parables.”ⁱ This intervening age is not the kingdom in any form. However, this intervening age is associated with the Kingdom.ⁱⁱ

	<u>Parable</u>	<u>Scripture</u>	<u>Interpretation</u>
1	Sower and the Soils	Matt. 13:3-8, 18-23	Who Has Understanding?
2	Wheat and Darnel	Matt. 13:24-30	A New Age Will Intervene
3	Mustard Seed	Matt. 13:31-32	Growth in Number of Kingdom Heirs
4	Leaven	Matt. 13:33	Increasing Apostasy
5	Hidden Treasure	Matt. 13:44	Kingdom Hidden; Jesus Will Find
6	Precious Pearl	Matt. 13:45	Redeemed of All Ages in Kingdom
7	Drag Net	Matt. 13:47-50	Judgment at End of New Age
8	Head of Household	Matt. 13:52	Wed Old Truths with New

The interpretation of these parables may be debated but the primary thing to note is that these parables of the Lord are not describing a new ‘form’ of the kingdom but are revealing a new intervening age that is associated with the future Kingdom.

MYSTERY 2

“PARTIAL HARDENING OF ISRAEL UNTIL FULLNESS OF GENTILES HAS COME IN”

Romans 11:25-26 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of *this mystery*-- so that you will not be wise in your own estimation-- *that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;*²⁶ and so all Israel will be saved;

In the OT it was totally unrevealed that Israel would undergo a period of partial hardening. There has always been a remnant of believing Jews and a non-remnant of unbelieving Jews, but it was wholly unknown in the OT that national Israel would undergo a period of history where they would be partially hardened *before* the Kingdom would come.ⁱⁱⁱ During this intervening age of partial hardening some individual Jews will believe in Jesus' Messiahship but the majority will not. This partial hardening will be lifted when the “fullness of the Gentiles has come in”. The “fullness of the Gentiles” will be reached by the end of the tribulation when Israel will accept Jesus as Messiah. At that point “all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26). “All Israel” refers to the nation of Israel; every descendant of Jacob living on earth at the end of the Tribulation. According to Zechariah 13:8, 9 this will constitute 1/3 of the total population of Jacob's descendants which entered the Tribulation.

MYSTERY 3

“MYSTERY OF FAITH AND GODLINESS”

1 Timothy 3:8-9, 16 Deacons *must be*...holding to the *mystery of the faith* with a clear conscience...And by common confession great is the *mystery of godliness*: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.

In verses 8-9 one of the qualifications of deacon is set forth as holding to the mystery of the faith. The mystery of faith refers to the *content* of faith; what one must believe in order to be saved which is outlined in v. 16. In v. 16 the mystery of godliness is mentioned and defined as the person and work of Christ: revealed in the flesh (Incarnation), vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, and taken up in glory (Ascension). The mystery of godliness therefore refers to Christ as the *object* of faith.

MYSTERY 4

“CHRIST IN YOU”

Colossians 1:26-27 *the mystery* which has been hidden from the *past* ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,²⁷ to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, *which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

The mystery here is not that Christ would be among them in the future earthly Kingdom. That was known in the OT. What was not revealed was that Christ would indwell them. ‘Christ in us’ is the certainty (hope) of receiving a glorified body (glory).

MYSTERY 5

“BELIEVING JEWS AND GENTILES ARE CO-EQUALS IN ONE NEW BODY, THE CHURCH”

Ephesians 3:3, 6 that by revelation there was made known to me *the mystery*, as I wrote before in brief...*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,*

Paul says that this mystery was made known to him by revelation and that he wrote about it before in brief. Paul is probably referring back to the previous context 2:11-22 where he spoke about Jews and Gentiles being brought near through the blood of Christ. The mystery is not that Jews and Gentiles could be saved or that believing Gentiles become a part of Israel but that believing Jews and Gentiles are co-equals and fellow members of one new man that is neither Jew nor Gentile, the Church.

MYSTERY 6

“CHURCH AS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST”

Ephesians 5:32 *This mystery is great;* but I am speaking with reference to *Christ and the church.*

Paul says this mystery is profound. After quoting Genesis 2:24 Paul applies this metaphorically to Christ and the Church. Israel was the wife of Jehovah but the Church is the bride of Christ. This new relationship which pictures grace on Christ’s side (Husband) and faith on the Church’s side (bride) was totally unrevealed in the OT.

MYSTERY 7

“7 STARS = 7 MESSENGERS AND 7 LAMPSTANDS = 7 CHURCHES”

Revelation 1:20 As for *the mystery of the seven stars* which you saw in My right hand, and *the seven golden lampstands*: the *seven stars are the angels* of the seven churches, and the *seven lampstands are the seven churches*.

The Greek word translated “angels” is *angelos* and can also be translated “messengers”. Walvoord says, “The mystery of the seven stars is revealed to be a representation of the messengers to the churches, and the seven golden lampstands are the churches themselves.”^{iv} Cunningham says, “The seven stars are “angels” or literally “messengers” (pastors) of the seven churches which are represented by the seven lampstands. Jesus walks in the midst of the churches (verse 13) and holds pastors of those churches in His right hand (verse 16). He must be the central figure of all true churches—and the ultimate authority over every pastor.”^v Garland says, “When all these factors are considered, it would appear that the best solution is one that takes the “angels” as human messengers or leaders of the churches while recognizing that much of what Christ says to the angel as an *individual* is also meant for the *entire church*.”^{vi}

MYSTERY 8

“MYSTERY OF WICKEDNESS BEING RESTRAINED”

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 And you know what restrains (neuter) him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. ⁷ For *the mystery of lawlessness* is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way.

The Greek word translated “lawlessness” is *anomia* and meant “wickedness” or “iniquity” in 1st century Greek. It does not refer to breaking the Mosaic Law. It refers to utter wickedness and iniquity. The man of wickedness was mentioned and described in 2:3-4. He is the Antichrist. The ‘mystery of wickedness’ is that it is presently at work but is being restrained. The ultimate end-times Antichrist has yet to come but the spirit of antichrist is already at work. However, this wickedness is being restrained. It is debated what exactly it is that is restraining the wickedness. It is probably the Holy Spirit that is restraining wickedness through various means such as the church and human government. When the church is removed at the pre-Trib Rapture and human government is undermined by the rise of the Antichrist to world power, apostasy will grow at a rate never before seen on earth. But the mystery here is that wickedness is already at work but is being restrained.

MYSTERY 9

“RAPTURE OF CHURCH SAINTS”

1 Corinthians 15:51 Behold, I tell you *a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed,*

The resurrection was known in the OT, what was not known was that some people would not die but would be transformed while living at the resurrection. There is one generation of Church saints who will not die but will be transformed while alive on earth into their new resurrection bodies. This will happen in the blink of an eye.

MYSTERY 10

“MYSTERY OF 3 STAGES OF 7 JUDGMENTS EACH”

Revelation 10:7 but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then *the mystery of God is finished,*

This is the end of one of the “mysteries of God” (notice ‘mystery’ is singular). The ‘mystery’ here is the mystery of the how the OT prophecies of judgment would work out. They knew that judgment would precede the Kingdom, but what was not known was that this judgment would come in 3 stages (seals, trumpets, bowls) of 7 judgments each (21 judgments total). When the bowl judgments are about to begin it is signaled that *the mystery of God is finished*. The Kingdom of God is about to begin as signaled by the voices in heaven which are saying, “The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever” (11:15).” Where the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven in Matt. 13; Mark 4; Luke 8 looked at the whole program of the intervening age this text refers only to the end of the age and corresponds with Parable 7 (Dragnet) of Matt. 13. The mystery of wickedness (2 Thess. 2:7) is about to be destroyed.

MYSTERY 11

“THE CITY OF BABYLON WILL BE HEADQUARTERS FOR ANTICHRIST”

Revelation 17:5, 7 and *on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."* ... And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I will tell you the *mystery of the woman and of the beast* that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

The mystery has to do with a woman and the beast. The woman refers to the city of Babylon (Rev. 17:18) and the beast refers to the Antichrist (Rev. 13:1-10). The content of the mystery is therefore that the city of Babylon will develop into a one-world, unified political, economic, and religious system and will serve as the headquarters of the Antichrist.^{vii} The Antichrist will be killed by Christ Himself and the great city Babylon will be destroyed by Christ Himself in one hour (Rev. 18:19). This was totally unknown in the OT and it is the end of the two Satanic mysteries and the end of the NT mystery doctrines. Sin will be destroyed and righteousness will dwell on the earth. After this the Kingdom program will begin again when the King will enter world history and He will rule on earth with a rod of iron for 1,000 years. We will be in this kingdom in accordance with the parables of Matthew 13 and other passages. This Kingdom will then continue as it merges into the New Heavens and New Earth and is transferred from the Son to the Father. The important point is that we are not in the Kingdom now. We are heirs of the kingdom but we presently live in an intervening age that is not a 'form' of the kingdom in any sense.

MYSTERY 12

“GOD WILL BRING TOGETHER ALL THINGS AND RESTORE THE WHOLE CREATION UNDER ONE HEAD”

Ephesians 1:9-10 “He made known to us the *mystery of His will*, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth in Him*”

This is the ultimate goal of God in history; the total restoration of all things. The key is to understand the first Adam and the last Adam. Christ came to fulfill what Adam failed to fulfill. Adam introduced chaos and division into the created order, Christ came to introduce order and unity in the created order. This is what was implied in the Greek word *anakephalaiosasthai* in Eph. 1:10 (translated “summing up” but really means “to unite under one head”; cf. Heb. 8:1). So, the mystery here is concerned with the Messianic Kingdom. It indicates that God’s will in history is to bring all of creation under the headship of Christ. This is the consummating age of history where God’s will answer the prayer “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. God’s will is always done in heaven, now God’s will shall be done on earth for the 1,000 years and for eternity in the New Heavens and New Earth.

OTHER IMPORTANT REFERENCES TO ‘MYSTERY’ IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

“PROCLAMATION OF THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST IN YOU”

Colossians 4:3-4 praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth *the mystery of Christ*, for which I have also been imprisoned; ⁴ that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

The mystery here refers to the same mystery Paul discussed earlier in Col. 1:26, 27, that is, the mystery of “Christ in you”. Paul desires God to open up a door so that he will have the opportunity to proclaim this message to the Colossians.

“SALVATION IS BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST”

Romans 16:25-26 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* which has been kept secret for long ages past, ²⁶ but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, *has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith*;

This mystery has to do with the exact content of the gospel in this dispensation. One must believe in Jesus Christ in order to be saved. Additionally, Jesus Christ did not come to merely provide salvation for Israel but He came to provide salvation for all men. The basis (grace) and the means (through faith) of salvation are always the same. But the content of salvation changes with progressive revelation. The present content one must believe is that Jesus is the Christ.

Paul’s use of the phrase “and by the Scriptures of the prophets” does not refer to the OT prophetic Scriptures which would imply that the mysteries were revealed in the OT for Paul also says that “the revelation of the mystery...has been kept secret for long ages past”. Instead, it is best to translate “Scriptures of the prophets” as “prophetical Scriptures” as Godet and other commentators demonstrate. The apostolic writings were prophetic. This therefore refers to the NT prophetical Scriptures and not to the OT.

“THE WISDOM OF GOD = THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST”

1 Corinthians 2:7-8 *God's wisdom in a mystery*, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory; ⁸ *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have *crucified the Lord of glory*;

God's wisdom of the crucifixion of Christ was hidden from men. The crucifixion of God-incarnate displays God's wisdom in a new way previously unrevealed. The wisdom of God is revealed in that God's plan is so intricate, detailed, and complex, that He Himself came to be crucified for all men. He did not send another in His stead but became both the crucified and the crucifier, the justified and the justifier (Rom. 3:26).

“APOSTLES AND PROPHETS STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES”

1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man regard us in this manner, *as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God*.

The thing to note here is that Paul and others were designated by God to be “stewards of the mysteries of God.” Notice that “mysteries” is plural. It therefore refers to all of the NT mysteries. They were to teach and record information regarding all the mysteries of God.

“UNDERSTANDING MYSTERIES USELESS WITHOUT LOVE”

1 Corinthians 13:2 If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and *know all mysteries* and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, *but do not have love, I am nothing*.

To understand the mystery doctrines requires spiritual insight and maturity. They are a part of the self-disclosure of God (John 14:21-23). The knowledge and understanding of the mysteries is therefore very important as it gives us a more detailed picture of the mind of God as displayed in His purposes in history. However, knowing and understanding all the mysteries accounts for nothing if we “do not have love”. All knowledge and understanding should be used in a gentle and reverent way demonstrating a spirit of humility and care for other believers.^{viii}

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- ⁱ Toussaint, Stanley, *The Kingdom in Matthew 13* (paper delivered at the Pre-Trib Rapture Conference in Dallas, TX, Dec. 2003), 11.
- ⁱⁱ The intervening Church age is associated with the future earthly Kingdom in three distinct ways: 1) we are the prayer warriors for the Kingdom (Matt. 6:9-13), 2) when a person believes during the Church age he is transferred from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of Light, and 3) Christians are being prepared for service in the Kingdom.
- ⁱⁱⁱ It is important that this mystery does not say that Israel is being replaced by the Church, but rather that a partial hardening of Israel is taking place.
- ^{iv} Walvoord, John F., *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 49.
- ^v Cunningham, Gene, *The Book of Revelation* (private publication), 6.
- ^{vi} Garland, Tony, *A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (www.spiritandtruth.org), comments on Revelation 1:20.
- ^{vii} Fruchtenbaum, Arnold F., *The Eight Mysteries of the New Testament: Manuscript #182*, (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1992), p. 42.
- ^{viii} For more information on the New Testament mystery doctrines (see T. Ernest Wilson, *Mystery Doctrines of the New Testament*, pp. 10-12. He makes an interesting study which may be listed as follows (1) the faith, 1Ti. 3:9. (2) the church, Rom. 16:25. (3) the gospel, Eph. 6:19. (4) Jew and Gentile in one body, Eph. 3. (5) the bride, Eph. 5:32. Rev. 19+, 20+. (6) seven stars and seven churches, Rev. 1:20+. (7) of godliness, 1Ti. 3:16. (8) kingdom of heaven, Matt. 13:11. (9) Israel's blindness, Rom. 11:25. (10) rapture of the church, 1Cor. 15:51. (11) His will, Eph. 1:9. (12) of God, Rev. 10:7+. (13) the indwelling Christ, Col. 1:24-29. (14) the Godhead of Christ, Col. 2:2, 9. (15) of iniquity, 2Th. 2:7. (16) Babylon, Rev. 17:5+. Isa. 2:1-4.

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