

DOCTRINE OF THE MYSTERY

1. Definition:

- a. Mystery, according to Webster's dictionary, is something unexplained, unknown or kept secret. It is any thing or event that remains a secret or obscure as to excite curiosity. It can refer to the quality of being puzzled, difficult to understand, or even inexplicable.
- b. It can refer to the secret rites or doctrines known only to a small, esoteric group, specifically in ancient Greece, religious ceremonies, or doctrines revealed only to the initiates within the religious order. It can also refer to any of the ancient cults characterized by such rites, doctrines, and ceremonies.
- c. In theology, it can refer to any assumed truth that cannot be comprehended by the human mind but must be accepted by faith, for example, the inscrutability of the trinity or the essence of God.
- d. **Biblically**, the word “**mystery**” refers to the present revelation of previously unrevealed truth such as the person and work of Jesus Christ and the historic period known as the “**church age.**” (Eph. 6:19; Col. 1:25, 26, 27; 4:3)
Mystery can also apply to prophetic information unrevealed in present time but which will be revealed in yet a future time, such as “mystery Babylon the Great.” (Rev. 17:5)
- e. It must be noted that “mystery” in the Bible does not mean that information cannot be understood, but that something previously not understood can or will be understood.

2. Etymology:

- a. **μυστήριον** - musterion – (Greek noun.) mystery, secret, secret teaching.
(Rom. 16:25) Found 28 times in the New Testament.
- b. **μύεω** - mueo – (Greek verb.) to initiate into, as into the mysteries, derived from the verb (**μύω** - muo) meaning to shut the mouth or shut the eyes. (this word is never found in the New Testament).
- c. **μύστης** - mustes – (Greek n.) the one initiated (also never found in N.T.)
- d. **μυσταγωγός** - mustagogos – (Greek n.) the teacher, the guide, or “guru,” the one leading another into the mystery religion.
(never found in the N.T.)

3. **“Mystery religions” of antiquity** were secret cults which flourished in the Hellenistic world several centuries before and after the time of Christ.
 - a. Among them were the Greek Eleusian mysteries with their main goddess, Demeter, the goddess of harvest and fertility, and her daughter, Kore.
 - b. Another Greek mystery religion involved Dionysus, the god of wine, emotional excess, and frenzied dancing. His Roman name is Bacchus.
 - c. In Anatolia, roughly equivalent to modern Turkey, the Phrygians worshipped Cybele, another goddess of fertility, who came to be known as “Magna Mater” or “Great Mother.” This cult involved orgiastic rites accompanied by wild cries and frenzied music of flutes, drums and cymbals.
 - d. In Syria, another fertility goddess, Atargatis, was worshipped. Sexual excess characterized this cult complex also.
 - e. In Egypt, the goddess, Isis, saves her husband, Osiris, by bringing him back to life.
4. These ancient “mystery religions” offered the initiates **a religious awareness and experience** not enjoyed by outsiders. This was imparted at the initiation and at various stages, including dedication, advancement, and later a final revelation.
5. **Jesus Christ used the word “mystery”** to refer to a spiritual kingdom, *“the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt. 13:11) and the *“kingdom of God.”* (Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10)
 - a. Jesus spoke of this **kingdom as the “gospel”** He came to preach. (Matt. 4:23; Matt. 9:35; Mark 1:14; Luke 4:43; 8:1)
 - b. He also spoke of this **kingdom as being “at hand,”** already present (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 17:21) and yet as having some future fulfillment, “Thy kingdom come.” (Luke 11:2; Rev. 1:6; 5:10)
6. Therefore, for Jesus, the “mystery of the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God” was **the dynamic rule of God** which had invaded human history in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This mystery of the “kingdom” would bring men in this present age **the spiritual blessings** of the messianic age and would manifest itself literally in the millennial kingdom at the end of human history. (Rev. 10:7; 20:4)

7. In Revelation 17:5 and 7, we find another use of the word mystery. Here it refers to **“mystery Babylon the great.”**
 - a. While Babylon was an ancient metropolis on the Euphrates River, which fell to the Persians under Cyrus in 539 BC, it becomes a metaphor for Satan’s future cosmic (world) system (Rev. 18:2-24). Satan’s evil system will include a city, such as Rome, or some geographic location as per Rev. 17:7-10, 18; 18:16, 21.
 - b. However, the **“mystery Babylon”** (**“the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the Earth”**) of Rev. 17:5 is most certainly the future fulfillment of Satan’s “cosmos diabolikus,” which is mentioned prophetically by the apostle Paul during the beginning of the church age as the **“mystery of lawlessness”** (2 Thess. 2:7). This **Satanic spiritual system** will include widespread public disclosure of previously concealed information.
 - c. The precise nature of this secret or concealed information is alluded to by the mention of “Babylon” from the Old Testament, where Babylon was the persistent enemy of God, His purpose, and His people. (Isa. 47:1, 8-10)
 - d. The city Babylon itself exemplified false religion and political hostility against the redemptive plan of God as embodied in the Israelites. (Isa. 40-47)
 - e. The distinguishing mark of the Babylonian culture was its cosmic view of human nature. Every aspect of Babylonian society was deeply rooted in the esoteric pseudosciences of astrology, sorcery, and the power of occult symbolism. Spiritual entities (demons) were deified, kings and priests were thought of as god-men, and deluded human wisdom led to self-deification. (Isa. 47:8, 10, 12, 13)
8. Also in Revelation 17:3, John sees a **“scarlet beast,”** upon which the “mother of harlots” rides. This beast is the **“antichrist”** of the tribulation and is described by an angel as **“the mystery of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.”** (Rev. 17:7-17)
9. The word “mystery” is used 20 times by the apostle Paul to refer to the specific teachings of the dispensation of the church age as they relate to Christ and His “body.” (Col. 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3; Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 4-9; 5:32; 6:19)
 - a. Mystery doctrine was part of the divine decrees of God. (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:9-11)
 - b. Mystery doctrine was hidden to all past ages. (Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7, 8; Col. 1:26)

- c. Mystery doctrine has now been manifested in this present age. (Rom. 16:26; Col. 1:27; Eph. 3:9, 10)
 - d. Mystery doctrine is for all church age believers. (Rom. 11:25)
 - e. Mystery doctrine is revealed by the gift of prophecy. (1 Cor. 13:2)
10. The apostles of the pre-cannon era of the church age and the pastor-teachers in the post cannon era are stewards of the mysteries of God. (1 Cor. 4:1; Col. 1:25)
11. Pastor-teachers and deacons must believe and hold to the ***“mysteries of the faith,”*** church age doctrine. (1 Tim. 3:9)
12. The fulfillment of the protocol plan of God is occupation with the person of Jesus Christ called the ***“mystery of godliness,”*** (1 Tim. 3:16):
- a. ***“Revealed in the flesh”*** – the incarnation
 - b. ***“justified”*** – doctrines of impeccability and reconciliation
 - c. ***“observed by angels”*** – strategic victory in the angelic conflict
 - d. ***“proclaimed among the nations”*** – the gospel
 - e. ***“believed on in the world”*** – the way of salvation
 - f. ***“taken up in glory”*** – resurrection, ascension, session
13. **Mystery doctrine** as specific teachings of the dispensation of the church (***“the mystery of the faith,”*** 1 Tim. 3:9; ***“the mystery of His will,”*** Eph. 1:9):
- a. The intercalation of the dispensation of the church age into human history. (***“this mystery,”*** Col. 1:27; ***“the revelation of the mystery,”*** Rom. 16:25, 26; ***“dispensation of the mystery,”*** Eph. 3:9)
 - b. Israel’s rejection of their messiah, ***“a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”*** (***“this mystery,”*** Rom. 11:25)
 - c. The body/bride of Christ metaphor. (***“This mystery is great,”*** Col. 1:24; Eph. 1:23; 5:23—32; Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17; with John 3:29)
 - d. The head of the body is Christ. (God’s mystery, Christ, Col. 1:18, 27; Eph. 1:22)
 - e. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of Jesus Christ. (***“this mystery..., which is Christ in you,”*** Col. 1:27; with Rom. 8:8-11)
 - f. The gospel of Jesus Christ. (***“the mystery of the gospel,”*** Eph. 6:19)
 - g. The pastor-teacher and the local church. (***“the mystery of the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands,”*** Rev. 1:12-20)
 - h. The person, the work, and the destiny of Jesus Christ. (***“mystery of godliness,”*** 1 Tim. 3:16; ***“God’s mystery,”*** Col. 2:2; ***“the mystery of Christ,”*** Col 4:2)

- i. The “rapture of the church” (“*I tell you a mystery;...*” 1 Cor. 15:51-54; cf. 1 Thess.4:13-18)
- j. The Satanic strategy during the church age. (“*the mystery of lawlessness,*” 2 Thess. 2:7)

14. The end of the “great tribulation” concludes the “*mystery of God,*” (Rev. 10:7).

15. The manifold mysteries of God are described by the apostle Paul. (“*the mysteries of God,*” 1 Cor. 4:1; 13:2)