

THE RAPTURE

PART I

THE MYSTERY OF THE RAPTURE

By Arlen L. Chirwood

Scripture declares "the rapture" — the removal of Christians from the earth at the end of this dispensation — to be *a mystery*, something often overlooked or glossed over when dealing with this subject.

"Behold, I shew you a mystery..." (I Cor. 15:51ff).

Seeing the rapture introduced in this manner though *relates something quite indispensable about the subject*. The word "mystery" moves matters, at the outset, *to a realm of study not often taken into account when dealing with the rapture — drawing from the Old Testament Scriptures*.

The very fact that the rapture is "a mystery" *inseparably connects the origin of any and all teaching concerning the rapture with Old Testament revelation, particularly with typology in this revelation*.

And to ignore the manner in which the rapture is introduced is *to ignore the God-provided connection with the Old Testament and the typology found in the Old Testament*. It is *to ignore one of the numerous ways God has structured His revelation to man*.

And doing this is to ignore a facet of Biblical revelation, which, in this case, is *to ignore information which God has deemed necessary for man to properly understand the rapture*.

Use of the Word "Mystery" in the N.T.

The word "mystery" is used twenty-seven times in the New Testament.

It is used one time in each of the three synoptic gospels, for the same event — *the mysteries of the kingdom* (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10).

It is used twenty times in the Pauline epistles.

Paul used the word numerous times to reference *the gospel which he had been called to proclaim throughout the Gentile world* (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3, 4, 9; 6:19; Col. 1:26, 27).

He used the word to reference *Israel's blindness*, awaiting the fullness of the Gentiles, to be followed by Israel's salvation (Rom. 11:25, 26).

And, as previously seen, among several other usages, Paul used the word to reference *the coming resurrection of Christians and the corresponding removal of the living at the end of the present dispensation* (I Cor. 15:51ff).

The word is not used in Hebrews or the general epistles, but it is used four times in the Book of Revelation. It is used of *the seven stars* (1:20), of *God* (10:7), and of *the Woman and the Beast* (17:5, 7).

Meaning of the Word "Mystery" in the N.T.

The word "mystery" is an Anglicized form of the Greek word *musterion*. The word has to do with *something hidden, a secret*. It has to do with *something beyond human comprehension, something which cannot be explained by human endeavors, human ingenuity*.

In the light of the exact meaning of this word, note R.C.H. Lenski's comments in his New Testament Greek word studies on the use of *musterion* in Matt. 13:11:

"These are 'mysteries' [the mysteries of the kingdom] because men by nature and by their own abilities are unable to discover and to know them. It must 'be given' to a man 'to know' them. This divine giving is done by means of revelation..."

In this respect, seeing that the word "mystery" is used of the rapture, one must then understand the meaning of this word and how it is used in the

New Testament. Then, one can proceed from that point and know that matters concerning things dealt with through the use of this word *cannot be explained through human comprehension*. *Divine intervention must be involved*.

God must make things pertaining to a mystery known to an individual; and God makes things known today through *one means alone — through His Word*.

Thus, understanding what is involved in the use of the word "mystery" and that this word is used to reference the rapture, one can know that the only possible way to learn things about the rapture is *through Divine revelation, i.e., through the Word of God, through comparing Scripture with Scripture*.

And this must be done, not just through using the New Testament, but particularly by going back to the Old Testament as well. As will be shown, the word "mystery," in reality, reflects back far more on Old Testament Scripture than on New Testament Scripture."

"A mystery" in the New Testament does not have to do with something completely new, something not dealt with at all or unknown in the Old Testament (a common misconception which is often taught concerning the meaning of the word).

This, of course, couldn't be true, for, there is nothing in the New that cannot be found after some form in the Old (*ref. next section in this part of the article*).

Rather, "a mystery" in the New Testament has to do with *an opening up and an unveiling of something previously introduced and dealt with in the Old Testament*. "A mystery" has to do with *additional revelation, commentary, on that already seen in the Old Testament, allowing the Old Testament revelation to be fully opened up and revealed* (e.g., note that a *full revelation of the Son* in the Book of Revelation [Rev. 1:1] allows the "mystery of God" [Rev. 10:7] to be correspondingly fully opened up as well, for Christ is God manifested in the flesh).

And the preceding is exactly what is in view through referring to “the rapture” by the use of the word *mystery*. There is an opening up, an unveiling of that previously revealed concerning the rapture, which, of course, would necessitate prior revelation on the subject.

This alone would tell a person that *foundational material for both can, and must, be found in the Old Testament, for, again, there is nothing in the New that does not have its roots someplace in the Old.*

The entirety of the Old Testament is about *the person and work of Jesus Christ* (Luke 24:25-27; John 5:39-47). And the New Testament, continuing from the Old — with “the Word” (the Old Testament Scriptures) becoming “flesh” (John 1:1, 2, 14) — must be viewed *in exactly the same light.*

Nothing in the New Not Previously Seen in the Old

According to John 1:1, 2, 14, the incarnation was simply the Word (the Old Testament Scriptures) becoming flesh. There is *the written Word* (which is living [Heb. 4:12]), and there is *the living Word* (which is the written Word, inseparably connected with the Word made flesh).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God...

And the Word was made flesh [*lit., ‘the Word became flesh’*]...” (John 1:1, 2, 14a).

For example, as previously seen, the Book of Revelation — which begins, “The revelation [‘opening up,’ ‘unveiling’] of Jesus Christ...” — is simply an opening up of the Old Testament Scriptures *through a Person, through the Word which became flesh.* And any thought of an opening up of the Old Testament Scriptures in this respect extending to and having to include an opening up of the New Testament Scriptures as well could only be

completely out of place, for there is nothing in the New that cannot be found, after some fashion, in the Old. If there were, there could not be *the necessary corresponding completeness* between the written Word and the living Word at a time before the New Testament even began to be penned.

The New Testament, *at any point, of necessity*, can only have to do with revelation which can be seen as having an Old Testament base. Revelation in the New Testament *must* bear the same inseparable connection with the Word made flesh as revelation in the Old Testament bears.

Thus, the existence of the Word made flesh *preceding* the existence of the New Testament clearly relates the truth of the matter concerning the content of the New Testament. The New can only be *an opening up and revealing of that previously seen in the Old.* To state or think otherwise is to connect the Word made flesh with one Testament and disconnect Him from the other — *an impossibility.*

In short, *the Old Testament is complete in and of itself;* the Word made flesh incorporates *this same completeness*, and the New Testament adds *nothing per se* to this completeness. Any supposed subsequent addition would be impossible, for *this would be adding to that which God had already deemed complete through the incarnation, the Word made flesh.*

(Note that the Word became flesh before any part of the N.T. was written. Since the incarnation [the Word becoming flesh] is simply the O.T. Scriptures being manifested in another form, completeness in God’s revelation of Himself, His plans, and His purposes *has to be seen in the O.T. Scriptures alone.*

If this is not the case, if the N.T. Scriptures adds anything not seen after one form or fashion in the O.T., then the Word becoming flesh before a single word of the N.T. had been penned *could only be seen as incomplete.*)

The preceding is why Christ, shortly after His resurrection, began at “Moses and all the prophets” (an expression covering the whole of

the O.T.) when He appeared to and began *making Himself known* to the two disciples traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31). The living Word, using the written Word, began putting together different facets of *a word picture pertaining to Himself.* And He could have gone to *any part of the Old Testament* to accomplish the matter, for *the whole of the Old Testament was/is about Him.*

Through this means, those being addressed would be able to see one (the word picture) alongside the other (the Word made flesh). And, comparing the two, they would be able to come into an understanding of not only *the identity of the One in their midst* but an understanding of *that which had occurred in Jerusalem during the past several days as well.*

This is the manner in which God has put matters together in His Word, making Himself, His plans, and His purposes known to man. And this is why the Son — God manifest in the flesh, the Word made flesh — undertook matters after exactly the same fashion when making Himself, His plans, and His purposes known to two disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day of His resurrection.

Then, the same thing is seen when He appeared to ten of the eleven remaining disciples (with Thomas absent) in Jerusalem a short time later (Luke 24:36-45; John 20:19-29).

And this is the manner in which all Scripture *must* be studied. The New Testament is simply an opening up of the Old Testament, whether dealing with the written Word or with the Word made flesh.

And when dealing with the rapture, particularly since it is referred to as “a mystery,” any proper study on the subject *MUST begin in the Old Testament, for that’s where all the basics can be found.*

Begin in the Old Testament, and you won’t go wrong. Begin elsewhere, and you likely will go wrong.

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