

The Danielic Background of the New Testament Word "Mystery"

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The New Testament word "mystery" (Gr. *musterion*) finds its background in the Old Testament Book of Daniel. Here the sovereign "God of heaven" is shown to be a "revealer of mysteries" (Dan. 2:18-19, 27-30, 47) in regards to his divine plan of salvation. New Testament scholar J.D.G. Dunn explains the implications and meaning of this word "mystery" while commenting on Col. 1:26 "... the mystery hidden from the ages and generations."

The term *musterion* [mystery] heightens still further the already eschatological and apocalyptic sense of being privileged to see the whole sweep of human history from God's standpoint. For here it is clearly dependent on Jewish apocalyptic usage, where "mystery" refers not so much to undisclosed secrets (as it is used in regard to the rituals of contemporary Hellenistic mystery cults) as to secrets of the divine purpose now revealed by divine agency. This usage begins with the first classic Jewish apocalypse, Daniel ... It is indeed at the heart of the

apocalyptic rationale: what has been "revealed" to the apocalyptist is precisely the "mystery" of how the cosmos functions and particularly of how God's purpose will achieve its predetermined end.

What is claimed here, then, is the basic Jewish apocalyptic credo, which goes beyond the Platonic-Stoic axiom that the cosmos is rationally ordered (Col. 1:15-20) and claims further that not only the three dimensions of spatial existence but also the fourth dimension of time is firmly under divine control. The movement of world history is a linear progression which has also been directed by a secret purpose determined from the beginning by God. It is a secret purpose, hitherto "hidden" by divine intention (as in Luke 10:21; I Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:9). But "now" (the eschatological Gr. *num*, similar to Col. 1:22), as that purpose nears or reaches its climax ... it has been revealed. This is what gives apocalypticism its character: the claim to be privileged "now" with an insight into God's purpose for creation not [previously] given to others.

[*The NIGTC The Epistles to the Col. and Philemon.*, Eerdmans, p. 119-120].

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