

The Mystery of Iniquity

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

The mystery of iniquity refers to the final manifestation of evil and the 'Man of Sin' who will be the superlative representation of Satan's power and the incarnate realization of his timeless secret purpose.

Scripture: Isaiah 14:14, Matthew 24:21, Luke 4:5, Romans 11:25, Ephesians 3:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:9, 2 Thessalonians 2:7, 1 Timothy 3:16, Revelation 13:4

Topics: "End Times", "Kingdom Of Heaven"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer delves into the concept of the 'kingdom of heaven' and its various stages throughout history, from God ruling through patriarchs, judges, and kings of Israel to the rejection and crucifixion of the rightful King, leading to the new age of blessings. He emphasizes the foreknowledge and plan of God in the rejection and delay of the earthly kingdom, as well as the mysteries surrounding the present divine government and purposes on earth, including the church's role and the manifestation of the 'mystery of iniquity.' Chafer also discusses the tribulation period, the 'Man of Sin,' and the distinct divine purposes during that time, highlighting the importance of understanding these prophecies for a comprehensive view of the end times.

Transcript

The term "kingdom of heaven" may rightfully be applied to any phase of the divine government in the earth. It has already passed through several distinct stages as recorded in history. God ruled through the patriarchs, judges and kings of Israel. The last rightful King of that nation was crowned with thorns. His rejection and crucifixion was the closing of the past dispensation and the grounds of blessing in the new age. Even before the cross His rejection was foreseen and the rejected King began from that time to speak of His death, the new dawning age, and of His return to this earth in power and glory. Then the rejected and postponed kingdom blessings were to be realized for Israel and all Gentile nations through them.

All this, even His rejection and the delay in the earthly kingdom, was in the foreknowledge and plan of God. Christ, as foreseen by prophets, was pictured in the figure of the coming "Lamb" sacrifice to be slain, as well as in the figure of the coming "Lion" King to reign; though the larger proportion of prophecy concerned itself with the latter. The prophets uttered these conflicting themes; they saw the sufferings and the glory; they did not comprehend the centuries of this church age that were to intervene. They saw the mountain peaks, but not the expanse of the valley of this age of grace. It pleased God to keep this period

of time and its purpose as a sacred secret, or mystery, until the time of its realization. It is imperative that this fact should be understood, else an approach to Scriptural knowledge of the kingdom program is impossible.

Christ treated the present unannounced age as a sacred secret, or mystery, demanding explanation. Since His revelatory discussions on the subject it, like all other New Testament mysteries, remains no longer a mystery when explained. The preview of the facts of this mystery age are given in the seven parables of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. It is also significant that this revelation of a new unforeseen age should follow immediately upon the first evidence of His rejection as Messiah King. These parables reveal the elements and conditions which characterize this age and which had been withheld in the councils of God. They are therefore spoken of as "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. xiii. 11), and this whole age may be rightfully termed "the kingdom of heaven in its mystery form." These parables treat of the beginning, course and end of the age which was then wholly future, but much of which has been faithfully fulfilled in the history of the Christian era.

The present period will therefore be seen to be that in which the kingdom of heaven in its mystery form is manifested and the divine unfolding of these mysteries to be a revelation of the present divine government and purposes in the earth. There are various other mysteries in the New Testament, some of which lend contributing elements to the one all-inclusive mystery age. Those New Testament mysteries which are related to the kingdom in its present form may be classified into three groups, each group representing a distinct purpose of God in the present age:

First, Israel's present position and age-long blindness is said to be a mystery:

"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant with them when I shall take away their sins" (Rom. xi. 25-27).

Second, The church is involved in four mysteries:

(a) As the body now being formed out of both Jews and Gentiles (Eph. iii. 1-10; Rom. xvi. 25; Eph. vi. 19; Col. iv. 3).

(b) As the bride of Christ (Eph. v. 28-32).

(c) As an organism by virtue of the indwelling Christ (Gal. ii. 20; Col. i. 26, 27).

(d) As to the manner of her departure from this earth (1 Cor. xv. 51-53; 1 Thess. iv. 13-18).

Third, The present age manifestation of the "mystery of iniquity" (2 Thess. ii. 7; Mt. xiii. 33; Rev. xvii. 5, 7). The central passage of this aspect of truth is here given:

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he

who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked (one) be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thess. ii. 3-10).

Paul, standing at the threshold of the new age, could say, "the mystery of iniquity doth already work." He then declares that this will continue until its culmination in the "wicked one," the "man of sin." This permitted development of the whole course of evil, he shows, will be under divine restraint in order that it may be consummated at the exact time divinely predetermined. Thus Israel's present blindness, the out-calling of the church and the final manifestations of evil will all be concluded in age-ending scenes; and these, taken together, form the distinguishing elements of the entire mystery age.

Iniquity had a definite beginning; it runs a well defined course; it comes to a predicted end. It has been the evident purpose of God to put every assumption of Satan and fallen man to an experimental test. This was illustrated in the case of Job. God did not deny the challenge of Satan as to the faithfulness of Job; He rather gave Satan authority to make full trial. Another plan might have been easier for Job, but we must believe that enough was gained by the trial to warrant the plan. The experimental trial on the part of God of all issues flowing out of any challenge of the Creator on the part of the creature, explains, in part, the various testings of the ages. Much suffering and sorrow might have been averted had sin been wholly crushed at its beginning; but again we must believe that much more has been gained by the long delayed termination of evil. From the above passage it would seem that evil would have long concluded its own course in the lawlessness of fallen hearts had its natural energy not been restrained. It has been restrained, we are led to believe by the evidence, that the body and bride of Christ may be made complete.

The end of this age is outlined in an important body of Scripture which is found in portions of Old Testament prophecies, of the Gospels, and is a large portion of the writings of the second Epistles and Revelation. In all these records the disclosures concerning persons, times and events are in perfect agreement, though found in such widely separated sources, and to ignore them, or to form different conclusions than those which they predict, discredits the validity of the testimony of the one inspiring Spirit. The age is to end with a tribulation period which is not difficult to distinguish, chiefly from the fact that it is spoken of as the incomparable sorrow upon the earth:

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened"(Mt. xxiv. 21, 22).

"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. xii. 1).

"A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been even the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations" (Joel ii. 2).

"And these are the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the Lord; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a

man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it" (Jer. xxx. 4-7).

Three distinct divine purposes may be discovered in this tribulation time. The passages here referred to are of great importance, but cannot be quoted in full:

First, It is the time of "Jacob's trouble." Special and final judgments upon the chosen people, which have long been foretold, will end their age-long afflictions (Jer. xxv. 29-39; xxx. 4-7; Ezek. xxx. 3; Dan. xii. 1; Amos v. 18-20; Obadiah 15-22; Zeph. i. 7-18; Zech. xii. 1-14; xiv. 1-3; Mal. iv. 1-4; Mt. xxiv. 9-31; Rev. vii. 13, 14).

Second, This period will be a time when judgment will fall on the Gentile nations and the sin of the whole earth (Job xxi. 30; Ps. ii. 5; Isa. ii. 10-22; xiii. 9-16; xxiv. 21-23; xxvi. 20, 21; xxxiv. 1-9; lxiii. 1-6; lxvi. 15-24; Jer. xxv. 29-38; Ezek. xxx. 3; Joel iii. 9-21; Zech. xii. 1-14; Mt. xxv. 31-46; Rev. iii. 10; xi. 1--xviii. 24).

Third, This time is also characterized by the appearance and reign of the "Man of Sin" whose career, like the period in which he appears, cannot begin until the divine restraint is removed (2 Thess. ii. 6-10), and will end with the return of Christ coming in "power and great glory" (2 Thess. ii. 8). This world-ruler is the fitting manifestation of the last efforts of Satan in his opposition against God and his attempted self-exaltation above the Most High.

Again, The church is nowhere seen nor in any way related to the tribulation period, which is constantly represented and distinctly said to be the time of "Jacob's trouble." There is great salvation during the tribulation and a mighty harvest of saints from it are seen in the glory, even a multitude which no man can number (Rev. vii. 9-17). It does not follow that these are a part of "the church which is his body" any more than that the saints of the Old Testament are a part of that body: rather the church is to be saved out of the hour of trial that shall come upon the earth to try all men (Rev. iii. 10). Not only is this true in Old Testament types (judgment cannot fall on Sodom until Lot and his family are removed) but the tribulation is not once mentioned in the Epistles wherein the instruction and warnings are given to the church, nor does the church or the first resurrection appear in those passages which are descriptive of the tribulation. In the reckoning of God, most evidently, the tribulation, or time of Jacob's trouble, does not concern the church.

The character of the tribulation and its terrible display of the wrath of God is described in the successive judgments predicted in Rev. ii.--xix., but of the church it is said, "we are not appointed unto wrath" (1 Thess. v. 9; see also Rom. v. 9; 1 Thess. i. 10).

To contend that the church must pass through that unprecedented period virtually destroys every promise of His imminent return; for in such a case the church to be consistent must have her eyes on earth conditions when she is rather enjoined to be looking for her Lord from heaven. By such a theory the blessed hope is lost. So, also, the very martyrdom of loyal saints, in that period (Rev. xiii. 15), would render groundless any hope for the translation of living saints at its end. And so, again, much that is most precious in church truth is confused and lost when related to "the time of Jacob's trouble."

As the Lord appears from heaven in power and great glory (Rev. xix. 11) He is accompanied by the armies of heaven, their identity being revealed by the white linen they wear (cf. Rev. xix. 14 with 7-10). At some previous time, the bride has met the Bridegroom, else how could she thus return with Him to reign? Is

there not a danger in all this of saying, "My Lord delayeth his coming"?

The beginning, course and end of evil may be traced in four crises in the career of Satan. Sin began with him before recorded time when he said within the secret of his heart, "I will be like the Most High" (Isa. xiv. 14). It began as an assumption against God and a purpose to be like Him as an independent being, to gain the worship of other beings, and the authority and government that belongs to God alone. Satan's sin appears again when he met the first man and woman in the garden. Here he pressed upon them the secret purpose of his own heart and the motive of his own action when he said, "be as gods." In the fall which has followed that choice we have a race wholly independent of God, assuming self-sufficiency, self-seeking and self-worship. The satanic principle of assumption toward God is therefore the present attitude of the fallen nature in its relation to God. Again, Satan met the last Adam in the wilderness. There was no occasion there for him to advise the Lord of Glory to assume to be God. Satan knew full well that He was Very God; yet his own heart's passion could not be restrained, for he said, "worship me." In the permissive providence of God, and under the evident experimental test of the mighty assumptions of Satan, the whole course of evil with its human governments and independence of God has developed. It was at work at the beginning of the age. It is to have its final manifestation and defeat at the end of the age. The last permitted demonstration of this timeless purpose of Satan will be by his masterpiece the world-ruling, world-worshipped "Man of Sin" sitting in the restored temple and declaring himself to be very God (2 Thess. ii. 3, 4). Christ warns those of His own nation who will be alive at the time of those terrible scenes that this "abomination of desolation," sitting in the holy place, is a sign of the end and that the testing of evil by Jehovah will then be consummated (Mt. xxiv. 15).

To Daniel was given the vision of the course and end of the entire Gentile world period extending from the last captivity until the setting up of the covenanted kingdom in the earth. He also sees the final form of iniquity as gathered up in the reign of the "Little Horn" (vii. 8, 20-26; viii. 24, 25; ix. 26, 27) and the willful king (xi. 36-45; xii. 11). Ezekiel sees the same world-ruler as the "Prince of Tyrus" (Ezek. xxviii. 1-10), and there closely related to Satan as the "King of Tyrus" (Ezek. xxviii. 11-19). Christ speaks of him, quoting from Daniel, as the "Abomination of Desolation" (Mt. xxiv. 15; Dan. ix. 27), and, again, as the one who will come in his own name (Jn. v. 43). John sees him as the rider on the white horse (Rev. vi. 2), and the "Beast" (Rev. xiii. 4, 10). Paul sees him as the "Man of Sin" (2 Thess. ii. 3).

In all these prophecies this coming one is set forth as being the superlative representation of Satan's power and the incarnate realization of his timeless secret purpose. Satan offered all his world power and authority to Christ in the wilderness (Lk. iv. 5, 6), but it was rejected. This world power will be received and administered by the "Man of Sin" during the closing scenes of the age.

It is not possible in the space allowed here, nor is it germane to the purpose of this book, to trace the details of revelation regarding the tribulation and the "Man of Sin." This has been faithfully done by others and to some extent in the author's previous work, "Satan."

It may be concluded that the final demonstration of Satan's claim, with its certain failure, will prove him to have utterly failed in his ultimate aim, and then will every mouth be closed before the God of the whole earth. The righteous judgments of God against all wickedness, assumption and blasphemy will be accepted and His ways, which are past finding out, will be vindicated. "The mystery of iniquity doth already work," but it must proceed to its determined end and this mighty development of evil is one of the divine purposes of the entire period of this mystery age. God incarnate in the Son is a New Testament mystery (1 Tim. iii. 16), and Satan, seeking to be as God, and incarnate in the "Man of Sin" will, in that being, execute

the final manifestation of the age-long "mystery of iniquity."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/lewis-sperry-chafer/the-mystery-of-iniquity/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net