

THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY DOTH ALREADY WORK

TEXT: II THESSALONIANS 2:1-12

INTRODUCTION:

1. The word "mystery" is found 22 times in the Bible, all in the New Testament.
2. In Ephesians 6:19, the apostle Paul refers to "the mystery of the gospel."
3. In I Timothy 3:16, Paul says, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh."
4. In direct antithesis to this mystery of godliness is the "mystery of iniquity" (II Thess. 2:7) culminating in the coming of the antichrist (cf. 2:3-12).
5. Clarence Larkin said, "The 'Mystery of Godliness' is God manifest in the flesh, and the 'Mystery of Iniquity' is Satan manifest in the flesh" (*Dispensational Truth*).
6. Revelation 13:2 says, "The dragon (Satan) gave him (the first beast, the antichrist) his power, and his seat, and great authority."
7. And here in II Thessalonians 2:9 it says his "coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders."
8. Paul says, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work..." (II Thess. 2:7).
9. First John 4:3 says, "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."
10. This does not say the antichrist is already in the world. It says the spirit of antichrist, "even now already is it in the world."
11. Second Thessalonians 2:6 says, "And now ye know what withholdeth (restraineth) that he (the antichrist) might be revealed in his time."

I. ALREADY WORKING (2:7).

1. The mystery of iniquity was already at work when Paul wrote this epistle (2:7).
2. The word "work" means to work effectually. Oftentimes the word is used to refer to the working of the Holy Spirit.
3. Ephesians 3:20 says, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."

4. Philippians 2:13 says, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."
5. Most of the times this word "work" is used in reference to the power of God, but sometimes it refers to the power of Satan and his demons.
6. Ephesians 2:2 says, "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."
7. Referring to the antichrist, II Thessalonians 2:9 says, "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders."
8. Second Thessalonians 2:7 says, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work..." As the truth of God's Word has been proclaimed, the devil and his demons have been very busy proclaiming their error.
9. We see this just about every Saturday morning. We will go up the street knocking on doors giving out Gospel tracts, and along comes the "Jehovah's Witnesses" giving out their diabolical literature.
10. The Lord described how this works in his parables in Matthew 13 (cf. 13:24-30, 36-43).
11. Another vivid example is found in our Lord's letter to the church in Thyatira. First our Lord commends them for their works, and charity, and service, and faith, and patience (Rev. 2:19).
12. Then our Lord adds, "Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols" (Rev. 3:20).
13. Notice, these Jezebels are working inside the churches, teaching error and seducing church members.
14. In Acts 20, the apostle Paul gave a farewell address to the elders of Ephesus, and he warned them about "grievous wolves enter in" among them, and not sparing the flock (Acts 20:28-31).
15. This is how the mystery of iniquity is already at work (II Thess. 2:7). Lately, a Baptist pastor in Texas has been criticized by the liberal news media for his stand against homosexuality.
16. Why aren't pastors all over the USA speaking out against this wicked sin? People today say, "You cannot say that!" But God says it. Genesis 13:13 says, "But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly."
17. Genesis 18:20 says, "And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous."

18. Genesis 19:24 says, "Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven."
19. And all throughout the Bible, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is given as an example of the judgment of God against the ungodly.

II. IS BEING RESTRAINED (2:7)

1. The mystery of iniquity is presently being restrained. The word "letteth" has changed its meaning since the KJV was translated 400 years ago. Then the word meant to hold back, to restrain, to hinder (Scofield margin). Today it means just the opposite.
2. It is the same Greek word translated "withholdeth" in verse 6.
3. It means, "that which hinders the Antichrist from making his appearance." "He" in II Thessalonians 2:7 indicates this restrainer is a person.
4. And that person is the Holy Spirit. Who can stop the devil but God? Only the God the Holy Spirit is powerful enough to restrain Satan and his evil spirits.
5. Isaiah 59:19 says, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him."
6. From the book of Genesis all the way through to the book of Revelation we see the enemy coming in like a flood, and we see the Holy Spirit restraining sin.
7. In Genesis 6:3, the LORD said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man." The Holy Spirit was restraining sin back in the days before the flood. But God's patience wore out and instead of striving with man, God judged man's sin by sending the flood. God said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man."
8. The same thing will happen when God sends the tribulation here on earth. In Revelation 5, the Lord Jesus is pictured as seated on His throne getting ready to open up the book of judgment sealed with seven seals.
9. Then in Revelation 6 the seals are opened. The first seal is the antichrist. John says, "And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer."
10. Daniel 9:27 says the antichrist will sign a peace treaty with Israel. Once they ratify that treaty, the tribulation will begin.
11. Following the antichrist on his white horse will be a red horse, symbolizing war and bloodshed (Rev. 6:3, 4).
12. Then comes a black horse, representing famine (Rev. 6:5, 6).

13. Next comes the fourth horse. John says in Revelation 6:8, "And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth."
14. The rapture is imminent and it will be followed immediately by the tribulation. Jesus said, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21).
15. Acts 2 tells us that the Holy Spirit came down in great power on the day of Pentecost. And just as He came on Pentecost, He will "be taken out of the way" (2:7) when all believers will be removed at the rapture.
16. The "restrainer" in II Thessalonians 2:6 and 7 is a Holy Spirit-indwelt church. First Corinthians 6:19 says, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?"
17. The removal of both the Holy Spirit and the Bible-preaching churches from all over the world will release the world to sin like never before.
18. Today the presence of genuine believers in the world exerts a great influence upon this wicked, sin-loving world.
19. But things will change quickly after the rapture, and evil will be manifested beyond anything known in human history.
20. Some Christians have asked how can the Holy Spirit be removed, if the Holy Spirit is God, and God is omniscient.
21. The Holy Spirit will leave the world in the same sense in which He came on the day of Pentecost -- as the abiding Indweller of the church and of every genuine believer.
22. When we say the Holy Spirit will be removed at the rapture, we are not saying that God will cease to work in the world during the tribulation.
23. For example, Revelation 7 speaks of 144,000 Jews from the twelve tribes of Israel who will minister during the tribulation period.
24. Revelation 7:9 refers to "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" saved during the great tribulation.
25. But a big change will take place after the rapture. In Matthew 5:14, Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world."
26. Light dispels darkness. After the rapture, and Christians are removed, this world will be plunged into terrible darkness.

III. MINISTRY OF INIQUITY WILL BE UNLEASHED

1. Today we are living in the dispensation of grace. Strictly speaking this dispensation began with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and it will end at the rapture when all of God's people are translated into heaven. The church age ends at the rapture.
2. Today the mystery of iniquity is being restrained, but it will be unleashed after the rapture.
3. Our Lord said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." After the church is removed at the rapture, it will seem that the gates of hell will be wide open.
4. The way will then be clear for Satan and the antichrist to take over the world. The book of Revelation describes for us what the world will be like during the seven terrible years of the tribulation.
5. It will literally be like hell on earth. Revelation 9:6 says, "And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them."
6. Revelation 13:16 says the antichrist and the false prophet will force everyone, "both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."
7. This is much closer than people realize.
8. In the new Obamacare law, there is a section referred to as the National Medical Device Registry. This means everyone has to be implanted with a RFID (Radio Frequency ID) chip.
9. Just go on line and look it up.
10. According to the new Obamacare law, everyone will eventually be "chipped" with an implantable radio frequency transponder system for patient identification, health records, "and other data deemed appropriate by the government" (including financial records).
11. The stage is being prepared for the arrival of the antichrist. All over the television and movie screens are gory movies and shows about vampires, zombies, ghouls, and demons.
12. John 3:19 says, "men loved darkness rather than light."
13. Second Thessalonians 2:3 says "that man of sin (will) be revealed, the son of perdition." "That he might be revealed in his time" (2:6).
"And then shall that Wicked (one) be revealed" (2:8).
14. He will be revealed, and he will be defeated by the Lord Jesus Christ (II Thess. 2:8, 9).

15. But in the meantime, "the mystery of iniquity doth already work" (2:7), and many sinners are being deceived and swept into hell.
16. And it will be far worse after the tribulation, when "God shall send them strong delusion" (2:10-12).
17. Isaiah 66:4 says, "I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not."
18. God uses the evil consequences of sin as part of the sinner's punishment. That is why we see three times in Romans 1 -- "God gave them up."
19. Here is a good explanation by D. Edmond Hiebert: "They will fall under the influence of a power working within them, which leads them further away from the truth. Since they deliberately chose falsehood in defiance of the truth of God, God subjects them to the power of the error they chose" (*1 & 2 Thessalonians*).
20. Now is the time to get right with God. Tomorrow may be too late.
21. A preacher put it this way:

*There is a line, by us unseen,
Which crosses every path,
The hidden boundary between*

God's mercy and His wrath -- Joseph Addison Alexander

22. Today many Americans are under a "strong delusion" (II Thess. 2:11). But it will be far worse after the rapture. Now is the time to get right with God. Tomorrow may be too late.
23. People are believing lies today -- they believe in evolution, global warming, reincarnation, purgatory, going to heaven by doing good works, etc.
24. But it will be far worse after the rapture when they will believe the lies of the antichrist (II Thess. 2:9-12).
25. Christians often wonder why their unsaved loved ones refuse to repent and get right with God. We see the answer right here:
 - "They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2:10).
 - They "believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2:12).
26. The truth refers to everything in the Bible, but especially the Gospel. We see here a repudiation of the truth of God's Word. "They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2:10).

27. They "believed not the truth" (2:12). This describes many, many people today.

CONCLUSION:

1. Second Thessalonians 2:11 has puzzled some people. "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion."
2. Actually we see many examples of this in Scripture. It happened to Pharaoh, to King Saul, to King Ahab, and to many others (cf. Rom. 1:24-32).
3. Proverbs 5:22 says, "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins."
4. John 3:19 says, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."
5. Because men loved darkness rather than light, God will give them up to the darkness they love and have chosen.