

### (3) The Problem of the New Testament "Mystery" Concept

There are actually two problems here. One is whether a 'mystery' is something totally unknown in past ages or only dimly and partially known. The other is whether an epistemological mystery indicates an ontological mystery (in the absolute sense of mystery).

That is, if a spiritual reality (say, regeneration) was not revealed at all in the Old Testament, or not as clearly revealed in the Old Testament as in the New, does it follow that that spiritual reality did not exist in the Old Testament?

Can we adopt the hermeneutical principle that NON-REVELATION OF A TRUTH = NON-EXISTENCE OF THE CORRESPONDING REALITY, and apply this principle consistently?

John F. Walvoord (The Church in Prophecy, pp. 26-27) says that the term 'mystery' is "properly used throughout the New Testament to describe truth revealed in the New Testament which was hidden from view as far as Old Testament revelation is concerned."

And Lewis Sperry Chafer (Systematic Theology, Volume 6, pp. 72-73) says that "Of the present ministries of the Holy Spirit in relation to the believer--regeneration, indwelling or anointing, baptizing, sealing, and filling--nothing indeed is said with respect to these having been experienced by the Old Testament saints, excepting a few well-defined instances where individuals were said to be filled with the Spirit. Old Testament saints are invested with these blessings only theoretically, and without the support of the Bible, by those who read New Testament blessings back into the Old Testament . . ." Earlier in the same volume Chafer writes: "Individual regeneration, so far as the testimony of Scripture is concerned, is a New Testament provision. Though Israelites were rightly related to God as such by physical birth, they anticipated in time to come the reception of eternal life as an 'inheritance' . . ." (Volume 6, p.36).

Yet Chafer makes a fatal concession--one for which he has been roundly and deservedly criticized! He says (p. 73) "With respect to regeneration, the Old Testament saints were evidently renewed; but as there is no definite doctrinal teaching relative to the extent and character of that renewal, no positive declaration can be made."

But what can this mean? Old Testament saints were not regenerated, yet were evidently renewed? What is the meaning of "renewed" in this sentence? And since Chafer himself states that "there is no definite doctrinal teaching relative to the extent and character of that renewal," and that therefore "no positive declaration can be made," how can Chafer make the positive declaration that "Old Testament saints were evidently renewed"?

And what is even more difficult to understand is that Chafer made this positive declaration in 1948, whereas C. I. Scofield, writing in 1899 in his Plain Papers on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, stated the following (pp. 30-31):

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit is revealed . . . as a divine Person. As such He is associated in the work of creation . . . strives with sinful man . . . gives skill of hand . . . bestows physical strength . . . and qualifies the servants of God for a various ministry . . . To this should be added that operation of the Spirit by which the men of faith in the Old Testament ages were regenerated. While this doctrine is not explicitly taught in the Old Testament (except prophetically), our Lord's words in John 3:5 and Luke 13:28, leave no doubt as to the fact itself. Since the new birth is essential to seeing and entering the kingdom of God, and since the Old Testament saints are in that kingdom, it follows necessarily that they were born of the Spirit.