

A MYSTERY FOR GOD'S GLORY

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Romans 11 (1 Kings 19:9-18)

Opening Prayer: **READ Romans 11:33-36**

I love a good mystery, especially a suspense/thriller. Throughout the unfolding of the story, you attempt to make sense of all the roles of the characters in an effort to determine how things will all come together in a climactic conclusion. The best mysteries are those that surprise us in the end, especially when the clues were right under our noses throughout. God is the best mystery writer of all. No one, neither human nor heavenly being, expected God's King to be crucified, much less rise from the dead in victory over Satan, sin and death. The first coming of Jesus Christ proved to be a wonderful surprise that revealed a mystery of its own that involves the inclusion of Gentiles into the People of God. Of course, the clues to this mystery were evident throughout redemptive history and sprinkled throughout the Bible, but we see this only in retrospect, after the First Coming of Christ that revealed God's righteousness. We can look back in the Old Testament and see some of the most surprising Gentiles identify with God's People by their humble repentance and faith in the promises of Yahweh, promises that find their 'yes' and 'amen' in Jesus. For example, Rahab and Ruth, a prostitute from Jericho and Moabitess, are ancestors of Jesus. The coming of Christ to die for the sins of Jew and Gentile alike was a climactic surprise revealing God's mysterious ways and making sense of those biblical clues from the past. Therefore, we should expect to be just as surprised when Jesus Returns as Judge to consummate His Kingdom that continues to grow today. There remains a mystery behind how this will play out, so we do not want to be overly confident in asserting how we think it will end.

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Nevertheless, there is an aspect of this mystery that the Apostle Paul does not want us to be ignorant of. ***Romans 11:25-27 (READ)***. What does this mean? Well, ***verse 25*** is clear enough as it really summarizes what Paul has already articulated in ***Romans 11:1-24***; however, ***verses 26-27*** have been surrounded by controversy as to the 'mysterious' meaning of 'all Israel' that will be saved as prophesied by Isaiah and Jeremiah which are quoted by the apostle here. I do not presume to know the outcome to this mystery, but I am certain, as the conclusion of ***Romans 11*** beautifully highlights, God will be glorified by it. So, let us look at those aspects of this mystery that Paul clarifies for us so that we, as Gentiles, may not be ignorantly conceited.

According to Paul, I believe we can safely conclude that Israel's Partial Hardening has enabled the Merciful Inclusion of Gentiles so that All Israel Will Be Saved for God's Eternal Glory. Let's have a look at each of these.

1. Israel's Partial Hardening (READ Verses 1-12)

a. Elect Remnant of Abraham's Descendants by God's Grace

i. We must understand, especially with Paul's reference to Elijah, that the small number, only a remnant, of Believing Biological Descendants of Abraham have the saving faith of Abraham in Jesus as the Messiah, BUT that remnant is far greater than we perceive.

1. I emphasize the belief, or faith, of Abraham; because, this, for Paul, is what makes us children of father Abraham – faith in God's promises. So, this remnant would be Jews who believe in Jesus, and, while few from Paul's time up to our own, appear to be believers in Jesus as the Christ, there are more than is discernable from our human perspective.

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2. This is Israel's partial hardening – a hardening of a majority of ethnic Jews or biological descendants of Abraham from the time of Christ's First Coming until He Returns, but this is not a total hardening; because, a 'remnant' will come to saving faith in Jesus as King by God's electing grace.

2. Merciful Inclusion of Gentiles (READ Verses 13-24)

a. Here is a very clear warning to us, Gentiles, not to boast about our status among God's People; because, it is only by God's mercy through Jesus that we are included in the People of God along with other Believing descendants of Israel; all of us together as children of Abraham, as one tree, one vine.

i. If God could harden and break off some of the natural branches of this tree who were biological descendants of Abraham because of their unbelief in God's promises fulfilled in King Jesus, how much more can God remove us from His People if we proudly think we are secure because of our privilege of being included in God's Covenant Community. Remember, this is the Jews' prideful problem that Paul is addressing; a problem that has presently excluded them from God's People; because, they wrongly thought that simply being a biological descendent of Abraham was enough to receive God's promises, but we all, Jew and Gentile alike, are recipients of God's *mercy* which will be demonstrated in our humble faith in our Lord.

3. All Israel Will Be Saved (READ Verses 25-32)

a. "The full number of the Gentiles" The prophets looked forward to a time when all nations, all peoples, Gentiles, would worship Yahweh, the God of Israel. While we see occasional glimpses of Gentiles serving God in the Old Testament, there is an explosion of converts through the ministry of Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. This ingathering

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of an increasing number of Gentiles throughout time and from all over the world into the Kingdom of King Jesus will occur, in my understanding, until He Comes again. But, this ingathering of an unprecedented number of Gentiles does NOT exclude ethnic Jews, biological descendants of Israel, from joining in, even if it is through their envy of God's overflowing mercy to Gentiles who at one time did not even pursue righteousness (*Romans 9:30*) but have now attained it by faith in Jesus.

- b. "All Israel" (*verse 26*) – must be those who are saved, and I would include both those of the Old and New Testaments. Just as we have record in the OT of a few Gentiles believing in Yahweh and joining His People and just as we have record in the OT of a remnant of faithful believing Israel saved by God's grace, so too do we have a mixture in the Church, God's present-day New Covenant People, of both Jew and Gentile. However, the distinction at present is that more Gentiles are responding to the Gospel of God's promises fulfilled in Jesus than Jews. Paul, however, anticipates that the increase of Gentiles as members of God's People will make the biological descendants of Abraham envious and, therefore, believe in Jesus as the Christ for themselves. I believe this is an on-going process and a continuous interaction between Jews and Gentiles until Jesus Returns
 - i. I personally suspect "All Israel" here is equated with the whole batch of holy dough and the entire tree with its root and branches. I believe "All Israel" includes all who have received God's overflowing mercy (in both the Old and New Testament up to the present time and until Christ Returns), who come to believe in God's promises with circumcised hearts, and who have a faith like that of Abraham's. This would include both Jews and Gentiles today. Admittedly, this appears to be part of a mystery, and I could be wrong. Actually, I am

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pretty sure it will be far more spectacular and surprising than anyone could expect, just like the death and resurrection of Jesus. Could there be some surprising mass conversion if ethnic Jews in the state of Israel in the future? Admittedly, that would be an amazing thing to see, but I don't think that's what's in Paul's mind here. I think Paul is using "All Israel" as a covenantal / theological construct; NOT a racial / ethnic one. If so, he could have used the word "Jew" which is really a designation that arose at the time of the Babylonian Exile to designate people from the region of Judea, and this is what the designation of "Jew" meant up until, I believe, the 4th century AD. But, Paul uses the word "Israel" here; not "Jew". I am confident that the Apostle sees no other way to salvation apart from bowing the knee to King Jesus who is also the Great High Priest, the once-for-all perfect sacrifice for our sins, and the One who fulfills the Law as the revelation of God's righteousness. Paul, himself, had to come to this reality, and so will others, Jew and Gentile alike, if they are to be considered True Israel. Both Jews (ethnic and biological descendants of Jacob/Israel) and Gentiles are recipients of God's overflowing mercy, and that is what makes us His People, and in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile. That distinction has ended with Jesus' Coming as King. And it's all for...

4. ...God's Eternal Glory (in *Verses 33-36* which we read as our opening prayer)
 - a. Paul concludes all this with a wonderful doxology that gives God glory for His sovereignty and wisdom over all His Creatures, Jews and Gentiles.

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Here, we see God's inclusive, surprising and overflowing mercy to undeserved sinners all for His glory. This is Good News; because, it is God doing for us what we cannot do ourselves when it comes to His righteousness. God's sovereign mercy through His mysterious workings are intended to humble us before Him. We have nothing to boast about regarding our status as God's People; because, it is only by God's mercy we are His children and recipients of His promised inheritance to rule the world. We learn that there may be some religious people among us, those who profess to be Christians, who are really not converted and not truly part of God's People. Amid our increasingly anti-Christian society when we may feel that True Believers are a sinking minority, there is a faithful remnant larger than we may expect, and there are others yet to come into the Kingdom of Christ. Therefore, we share the Gospel of God's overflowing mercy with all people, including unbelieving Jews, so that 'All Israel' will be saved by God's mercy and for His eternal glory in King Jesus.

AMEN