

The Mystery of Israel

Romans 11:25-32

The word “mystery” stands out in most minds – it is a word that draws us in. And it is a word found – not often in the Bible – but found in key ways in Scripture.

We speak of high mysteries, heavenly wonders, beyond our thoughts.

The attributes of God are mysterious; his being one and being three; his power to create by speech is mysterious. His providence – His rule over all things – filled with secrets.

The mystery of the gospel – of the person of Christ in two natures; the transaction on the cross of our sins and Christ made our righteousness; how faith receives all things from Him, and the mysterious works of the Spirit bringing hell-deserving sinners to heaven.

But usually, when the Bible uses this term, it means a revealed mystery – a truth which could not be known apart from the Lord letting us in on the secret.

How Christ would be the Savior of the world was a mystery in the Old Testament. Paul says in Ephesians 3 it has now been revealed – it is not by making all people Jews. God receives Gentiles as Gentiles and unites them with believing Jews into one family.

The Book of Romans ends on this note:

²⁵ Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, ²⁶ but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the

prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;²⁷ to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. (Rom 16:25-27)

We have a mystery before us today, Mystery Israel!

‘I do not want you to be ignorant, my brothers, of this mystery. This hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved!’

How is all Israel to be saved? Who is this Israel to be saved? How do we understand this? That is the mystery which Paul says we must not be ignorant about.

There have been two main views of this.

Historically, the church has held that Israel as an ethnic body, would be brought back into the kingdom, brought as a people into the church, where only a few, a trickle had entered before.

But other views have caught on.

Some say Paul really is not saying there will be a future ingrafting again, but that verse 26 is saying “In this way all Israel shall be saved.” That is, Israel will only continue to have a trickle, a few, a remnant coming into the gospel tree.

The word “until” in 25 is not speaking of changed circumstances for Israel but rather an end. It would be translated: “up until, until a goal is reached.” The goal is the fullness of the Gentiles coming in.

So verse 26 says nothing more is expected than what Paul has already said in 11-24. The Jews will continue to be a hardened people who do

not turn to the Lord. And so Israel (as a group of Gentiles and Jews) will be saved in this way.

Now let me highlight three problems:

1. This is an unusual use of until, and proponents admit this. “Until” almost always means a change of circumstances, of condition. “I was hungry until I found some food.” “I was dead in sin until Jesus found me and gave me life.” Paul is speaking about a change for the Jews. He is saying they will go from being against the gospel to be brought to salvation in Jesus. The adverb “and so” in 26 – always has the meaning of ‘in this way’. The whole passage speaks of a change in circumstances for the Jews, that brings about salvation. If it is not, then you would think Paul would say, “And so all Israel shall not be saved.”
2. Second, this view is contrary to what Paul just said. He did speak of Jewish fullness in verse 12 contrary to Jewish failure. He spoke of the present holy remnant of believing Jews as a first fruit of a full harvest later.
3. Third, this view feels more like an axe to the Jewish tree than life in a gospel tree. Why would Paul say all this in 17-24 if Israel continues to be broken off? No – instead he foresees the coming day of change:

Since God could break off natural branches of the Jews for unbelief, and since God grafted in wild branches of the Gentiles by faith; then wild branches could also be broken off (even more so) and Israel the natural branch, can be grafted back in (even much more so!)

And now he says that they will!

It is not really a mystery for Israel to continue in unbelief. But it is if the gifts and calling of God are unchangeable in 29, and lead to Israel according to the flesh coming to Christ.

Ethnic and unbelieving Israel has been the topic since chapter 9. Paul is still speaking of ethnic Israel after 25-26.

So we come to the mystery revealed, to not be uninformed or ignorant of God's purpose toward Israel.

Verse 23 had the POSSIBILITY of a future Jewish conversion – God is able to graft them back in.

Verse 24 had the PROBABILITY since they are natural branches to the root.

There is a plain as day change from the present time of stumbling, falling, casting away, and enemies, to their coming fullness, acceptance and being beloved.

Paul's language is attention-grabbing. It is something big. It is not like the headline in the LA Times from last year, announcing an outbreak of Covid at John MacArthur's church. 3 people out of congregation of 7000 people, tested positive!

Paul is quoting here the OT prophet Isaiah to justify his hope – to Zion, to Jacob, comes a Deliverer, who will remove ungodliness from them!

Paul goes on to say treat them kindly because of this future certainty. See verse 28.

This does not say every single Israelite would be converted.

Even in Jewish writings like the Mishnah, which says all Israelites have a share in the world to come, proceeds to list a great number of those who have no share there, like those who deny the resurrection, or scoundrels like Jeroboam and Balaam.

This also doesn't say much to the issue of Israel having a possession of real estate in Palestine.

Israel as a nation has a right to their land by warfare and by law, just as other nations. They have a right to protect their sovereignty and borders. But they have no divine mandate to that land based by what was promised Abraham long ago. That was a type of heaven, and a picture of inheriting the earth, which Christ has done.

Let us now turn from the controversy and reflect upon the truth of this verse together.

The first thing we should see is how the progress of the whole people of God ought to be dear in our believing hearts.

You are going to heaven with other believers. Those believers included those sitting next to you in church. They also include believers who are very different looking than you!

Let us make friends of God's people, and consider the breadth and height of the great kingdom of Jesus Christ!

If angels rejoice at one sinner converted, how much more to see whole peoples redeemed? Let us sing the great words of Timothy Dwight – once President of Yale – “I love thy kingdom, Lord!”

The welfare of the church is critical for the support of the body of Christ growing and pressing onward.

Do more than sing, “We long to see your churches full!” Let us yearn, pray, labor, and participate in the growing fullness of the harvest!

There is a related lesson here. Don’t be discouraged if you happen to live in days of leanness, days of small things, when few seem to be saved and not many.

See yourself always as a servant to God, not serving only when it is successful or when you can go with the flow. Work in winter as well as summer; in health and in covid times.

Our concern for the church though is not man-centered, me-centered, our corner of the kingdom only.

Paul looked to the skies – that is the point of his quote from Isaiah.

In these OT chapters, Israel was portrayed as in deep, dark captivity and bondage; a picture of spiritual hardness and blindness.

But the Lord intervenes. The mighty arm of the Lord God Omnipotent is raised! “In that day, Jehovah with his severe sword, great and strong, will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent!” – Isaiah 27.

“Behold, the hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save!” – Isaiah 59.

Paul takes these verses he quotes and gives them a God-centered twist.

“The Deliverer will come **out of Zion**” instead of “The Redeemer will come **to Zion**”. And “He **will turn away** ungodliness from Jacob” for “He will **come to those who turn from** transgression in Jacob.”

The Jewish Rabbis had a place for those who turned from their sins and came to the temple, to the synagogue, as repentant. But Jesus taught how God seeks out and saves the sinner and brings them home.

Paul is saying that the Lord will bring his people Israel home. This is one of the signs of our Savior's second coming in His glorious kingdom.

Then let us see the nature of salvation unto us and all who are saved.
A Deliverer, Zion, Removing Sins, and My Covenant.

Do you live by one who is a Deliverer, a Rescuer, a *Savior* indeed?

The word for Savior, Yeshua, can still be seen in Israel today – on the side of ambulances. Salvation involves a rescue, a deliverance, a conquest of some need.

You cannot deliver yourself. That is what Paul's kinsmen thought. And so do believing Gentiles forgot their place of grace and fall away from the gospel.

And what does the Gospel do? It saves. Salvation is about dealing with our sins. It is not our dealing with them but God dealing with them, as only he can.

What a blessed thing! Ungodliness removed – there is the change of the heart, a new heart is given. Sins are taken away – there is pardon and washing by faith, where our sins are taken from us as far as the east is from the west. Jesus bore them away.

Jesus your deliverer, your redeemer, saves you from your sins, not in your sins. He saves you from ungodliness, not by ignoring ungodliness.

And what a salvation. As we saw in Romans 5, while we were ungodly, sinners, enemies, and helpless, the Lord had mercy. Mercy will be a big deal in our next message.

Know this that there is a people of God on earth. The Lord has his Zion, his Church, his People.

We are saved from something, to be saved to something. And that something is the new life lived in community with God's family. You become citizens by your conversion. And you are given a foretaste of being seated above in heavenly places, in the Lord Jesus.

Then finally, your salvation is covenantal.

God makes this covenant with you and with all his people. There is one gospel, one church, one election, one calling in one Savior, the seed of the woman, Jesus of Nazareth.

The covenant of the kingdom was rejected by the Jews of Jesus and Paul's day. The covenant continues to be preached to them, extended to them, graciously – and we see it will be received in great measure at a future date.

But this based not on flesh but on the gracious ways of the Lord. He must be satisfied, His mercy must win, the blood of His Son's atonement is not only sufficient, but efficient. He has not merely made salvation possible, but has saved a great host who must and will come to glory! he is the propitiation of the whole world. A whole world will in due time come to him. An almighty Deliverer, raised over sin, hell and death, demands it!