

The Knowledge of God's Ways

Romans 11: 25-29.

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SEPT/OCT. 1967

Recent incidents in the Near East have raised questions as to how far these happenings are related to God's thoughts for His earthly people. There is no intention, in this short paper, of entering into prophetic details; its object is to call attention to the fact that the believer, as indwelt by the Spirit of God, and as having recourse to the Scriptures, need not be in any doubt as to the completion of the ways of God.

Romans 10: 2-4 are basic in relation to the present state of Israel; they are ignorant of God's ways; they seek their own way, and do not submit to God's thoughts at all. In writing to the saints at Rome and (by extension) to ourselves, Paul says "I do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, of this mystery, that ye be not wise in your own conceits, that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the nations be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved", (Romans 11: 25, 26).

The word ignorant means to "be agnostic," and many are content just "not to know." The other extreme is to draw wisdom from the wrong source — "your own conceits." True knowledge and wisdom spring from the revelation which God has given to us in His word — and this revelation, this "mystery" — is something which God has been pleased to make known and of which we are not to be "ignorant."

Let us note carefully that "blindness *in part*" has happened to Israel. "Blindness" is a very strong word. It has the meaning of being hardened like a stone; the noun in verse 25 is actually a medical term "callus" — the hardening of skin, etc. This then is the moral state of God's earthly people. Incidentally, it is not confined to Israel; Ephesians 4: 18 uses the same word to describe the condition of the Gentiles. Now the context plainly shews two things. First, a remnant has been preserved from the general hardness of heart and moral blindness (cf. vv. 1-6). This is of grace and hence the glory is God's (verse 6). Secondly, the references in verses 8-10 show that God was not taken by surprise when His people turned their faces from Him (the cause of their present distress). The quotations from Deuteronomy, Isaiah and the Psalms fully prove His absolute foreknowledge of the whole position and what is most blessedly plain — the fact that He, in sovereign mercy, will yet restore Israel to full possession of their land and to obedience to Himself. "And I will take you from the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land" (Ezekiel 36: 24). "Every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord" (Zechariah 14: 21). This land is not limited to the narrow strip now possessed by them. Numbers 34: 1-12; Joshua 1: 3, 4; and other Scriptures show the area to be equal to, if not greater than, any *purely* European country.

Do we wonder that the apostle closes this most precious portion of the Scriptures with the delightful doxology of verse 33-36! "O depth of riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God .. for of Him, and for Him are all things; to Him be glory for ever." Paul (as Saul) had himself been marked by this callous "ignorance" (1 Timothy 1: 13) and "unbelief." Mercy had been shown him, and so he triumphantly says of his nation "God hath shut up together all in unbelief, in *order that He might shew mercy to all*".

Whilst thankfully rejoicing in the knowledge the Scripture affords us as to God's ultimate glory in His earthly people, let us also note the apostle's desires for those who are Christ's now, "But we do not

wish you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are fallen asleep . . . for the Lord Himself, with an assembling shout, with archangel's voice and with trump of God, shall descend from heaven; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we the living who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall be always with the Lord. So encourage one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18).