

The Tree of Life

Romans 11:16~25

Read 11:11~25... For the past several weeks, we have been looking at the “*role of Israel*” in God’s plan of redemption. Israel was a nation, chosen of God, one that God would use to bring about the salvation of fallen man. The nation Israel is *Gods chosen people*, meaning that they are the people whom God has chosen to work through, and to bring about the salvation of all mankind. Everything that God did and has brought about, He did so through His chosen people. Prophets, Scripture, Worship, Priest, etc...

All of which were as a shadow as it were, of the one to come... Jesus. But Israel rejected Him, wanted nothing to do with Him, and eventually had Him crucified on an old rugged cross. According to Paul’s gospel, the nation Israel as a whole, has killed her Messiah! And as a result, God’s glory has departed from Israel, and now has moved over to the Gentile nations... In this section, Paul is answering the question, does that mean that Israel is through, that Israel has fallen beyond restoration?

Speaking of the certainty of Israel’s future restoration, Paul uses two different analogies.

¹⁶For if the firstfruit *be* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*: and if the root *be* holy, so *are* the branches.

First, he points to the offering of the “*Firstfruit*” offering and the lump. Here Paul is referring to the offering of the “*First Cake*” of dough that was to be offered to God, as prescribed in Numbers 15. It was a commandment given by God through Moses to the nation Israel to be fulfilled each year, as an act of honor and worship of God for provision and blessing of the land. This was the second part of the “*Grain offering*. Each year at “*Harvest time*” of the grain, they would offer to God the “*Firstfruit*” of the grain offering, giving back to God the first portion of His blessings on them. Acknowledging God as the provider of the grain, acknowledging Him as the God of the grain. The significance here of the firstfruit is, that it represented a larger part, the whole. It was the “*first*” of the “*whole*.” The grain offering was a thank you for ALL the grain. The firstfruit of cake offering was a thank you for ALL the bread they would enjoy, at the hands of God.

Paul points to the principle found in these, to declare the certainty of Israel’s restoration. Paul points to the principle of the firstfruit to declare that God has not cast Israel aside, that Israel has not fallen beyond restoration. He does so by pointing to Abraham and the patriarchs as being the firstfruits. God set Abraham aside to Himself, He declared that out of him would come forth a Nation, one that would number as the stars. Abraham was the “*First of Many*.” Abraham begat Isaac, Isaac begat Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. Thus Israel here represents the “*lump*.” God’s promise to Abraham was to him and his descendants. It is on that promise to which Paul declares that Israel has not fallen beyond restoration. Israel will rise again! The guarantee of Israel’s rise again is not based on their faithfulness to God, but rather God’s faithfulness to the promise He made to Abraham!

He further declares this same truth by using the analogy of a tree.

... if the root be holy, so are the branches.

The point here is more clearly seen... Paul uses the analogy of an “*Olive Tree*.” The olive tree was used a couple of places in scripture symbolically for the nation Israel. Here in Romans, Paul is doing the same. The “*root*” of this tree is a reference to Abraham, and possibly the Patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob. The Children of Israel come out of the Seed of Jacob. Paul’s point here is, the “*Branches*” are simply an extension of the “*Root*.” You might say that the branches are simply “*roots above the ground*.” Branches are derived “*Out of*” the ROOTS. The point here is, because of Israel’s connection to Abraham and the Patriarchs... because they are simply an extension of Abraham, Abraham’s offspring, and they will rise again to partake in the promises of God.

Paul saw an amazing thing taking place as a result of Israel rejection of Jesus...
Paul describes God's entire plan of redemptive history by using a Tree.

At the end of this analogy, in verse 25, Paul declares the importance of understanding the truth that is given through this analogy.

²⁵*For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.*

Paul says its important to understand what God is doing, so that you don't get the wrong idea, and get high-minded, and end up like Israel...cut off! Which could easily happen. Through the nation's rejection of Christ, it appears that Israel have severed themselves from God for good. Knowing that Paul preaches that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the promised Messiah, and knowing what Israel did to Him, it appears that Israel has sealed their own fate. But here in this passage, Paul uses an olive tree as his illustration, to "reveal" what God is doing...

The "Olive tree" is a very familiar symbol of the Nation Israel... One of the earliest mentions of it is found in Genesis 8, where Noah sent out the Dove during the flood, to have it return with an "olive leaf" in its mouth. (First sign of life...) The prophet Hosea uses an "olive tree" to represent Israel, the prophet Jeremiah used it as well. The Hebrew word for Messiah means to "smear with olive oil." Christ means the "anointed one." Which signified the anointing the head of Kings with oil... So the olive tree has a rich history with Israel.

(Illustration... Cutting off of branches) Its important to begin at the bottom... The "Roots" of this tree represent Abraham, and possible includes the Patriarchs. The root of the tree is the most important part, it is the life of the tree. The roots of this tree were grounded in "Faith," through Abraham. While the trunk of the tree represents the life giving flow of life! The sap comes through the roots, up the trunk, to the branches. Up until Christ death, the branches were all Jews, with maybe the exception of a Gentile or so who have fully converted to Judaism. But during Christ visit to Israel, Paul explains that as a result of Israel's unbelief, most of the branches have been severed from the tree. These severed branches represent "unbelieving Israel." Now notice, not ALL Israel has been cut off, there still remain a few branches. These represent "True Israel." These refer to Messianic Jews who received and follow Jesus Christ as Lord. This "pile of cut off branches" represents the unbelieving portion of the nation Israel.

Rather than seeing this as the end of Israel, Paul declares what is really happening is, this is the "beginning" of the Gentiles. Paul declares that the severing of the branches were God's doing, and the He did so to include the Gentiles as partakers of the covenant. He saw the surrounding nations, the Gentiles being "Grafted In" to the tree. Paul came to realize, that Israel's rejection of Christ was all part of God's divine plan! By rejecting Christ, they were broken off, making room for other branches to be grafted in their place.

(Vs 17~19) Paul warns the Gentiles not to "Boast" of this blessed privileged position we have received. The fact that Israel has been broken off and we Gentiles are now enjoying the "Blessings of God," is no reason to boast as though we did something great, or that it is because we deserve it. It is not we who bear the root, but the root bears us!

(Vs 19) Paul says, if you want to boast, boast of the fact that they were removed so that it would be possible for you to be grafted in! If they hadn't been broken off, we would have not have had the privilege of being partakers.

²⁰*Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou stand by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:*

²¹*For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.* ²²*Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shall be cut off.*

The only reason we are partakers in the covenant blessings, the only reason we've been given this privileged position is because of our "faith in Christ." Outside of that, we too would be cut off. Look closely to the warning Paul makes in verse 21...a spine chilling statement.

²¹*For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.*

Paul says you better keep in mind what happened to Israel as a result of their boasting of self-righteousness. They thought they had earned the favor of God, by their "works of righteousness" but because of unbelief, they were removed.

When you "take into consideration" what God has done to His chosen people, do you think He would hesitate to remove you? Paul reminds us Gentiles "severity" fell on Israel, and "goodness" has fallen on us. That's just the opposite of what you might expect. You would think it would be the other way around. But God has blessed us, and for now, has cut off Israel's blessings. And if we want to keep it that way, we better remain humble before God, be mindful of how we received this privileged position.

²³*And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.* ²⁴*For if thou were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?*

Israel may be broken off right now; they may not be enjoying the riches of God's blessings like we are right now...but all that could change if they'd just come to Christ. If God would receive us old sinful Gentiles, don't you think He'd receive His own people back? If God can take us, a "wild olive branch" and graft it in to Israel's tree, doesn't it seem reasonable, that He could graft the original branch back in?

²⁵*For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.*

(Vs 25) Paul says... So I want you to realize this, I don't want you to be ignorant of what has happened to Israel. I don't want you to misunderstand our position of privilege we've been given. If we Gentiles get high minded, we might end up cut off ourselves. The large part of Israel has been broken off so that the Gentiles to become partakers of the covenant. And according to God's plan, Israel will remain that way until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.

It's interesting that the fall of man came as a result of partaking of a Tree...the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And then here, Paul speaks of a tree that all men must partake of to be reconciled to God.

Beloved, you might say that Paul is speaking of... "The Tree of Life..."

The Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ... This tree Paul is referring to could even be referred to as the "Family Tree." Only those who are part of this tree are the "family of God."