

ROMANS 11:17-25 "God Is Able to Graft the Branches of Israel back into the Root"

Romans 11:17-25 ¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹ for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. ²² Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³ And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree? ²⁵ For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery-- so that you will not be wise in your own estimation-- that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

Last week we ended with the verses that identified Israel as a nation which had rejected the Messiah and in turn God opens the gospel to the entire world as He saves His people, both Jew and Gentile.

Romans 11:15-16 ¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will *their* acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the first piece *of dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.

The implication is that while Israel as a nation has become unholy, as that special instrument in the hands of God to bring about salvation for all men, God can and will still call out many Jews to be reconciled back to Himself.

This was the argument Paul had made earlier.

Romans 11:1 ^{NAU} I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Paul was a Jew who became reconciled back to God. Therefore, God has not rejected every Jews so as to be saved from the penalty of their sins. Paul proved that point as he was one of the cut off branches of the root who was grafted back into the root.

And this is where it is important to see the metaphor that Paul uses for this source of life that he identifies as a holy lump or a holy root.

But again, that is different from saying that the nation of Israel is to be grafted into the root to represent the root as the primary manifestation of the salvation God has secured in Christ.

The question I left you with last week was, who is being referred to as the dough offered as firstfruits? This is important because when we discover who the dough of firstfruits is then the rest of the dough, or the whole batch, must necessarily be holy, according to God's word.

The answer is found in those who were the first to be called out by God for His special purpose of being a people through whom the Messiah would come. The first piece of dough refers to the fathers or the patriarchs; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and so on. They were called out by God, set apart, and so they were holy in the sense that the promises given to them would be carried out to completion.

Paul furthers identifies this in verse 28.... "As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs,..."

We know that those promises were not just for those individual patriarchs because, for example, Abraham was told those covenants were given by God to him and to his seed, the descendants of Abraham.

If Abraham, being part of the first fruits of the dough was considered by God as set apart for a special purpose, (that is holy), then the rest of the dough would be considered holy or set apart for a special purpose for God.

The problem we can run into here is that we can misidentify Abraham's offspring as being, exclusively, the physical descendants, that is Israel as the nation. But, Paul has made it

abundantly clear that the physical seed cannot be the primary seed intended to be that which is holy.

Romans 4:11-13 ¹¹ and he [*Abraham*] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, ¹² and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. ¹³ For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

To suggest that God is obligated to fulfill any of the promises originally given to the nation of Israel so as to bless them in the future with the inheritance is to misunderstand what the inheritance ultimately is.

By the way, God did fulfill His promises to the nation of Israel by giving them the land of promise and then judging them for abandoning Him as Joshua records these words for us.

Joshua 23:14-16 ¹⁴ "Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed. ¹⁵ "It shall come about that just as all the good words which the LORD your God spoke to you have come upon you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the threats, until He has destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you. ¹⁶ "When you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you."

Israel, as a nation, is owed nothing from God as it relates to the promises given to Abraham as He has fulfilled every one of them, including the destruction of the nation, just as He promised.

The nation has been left desolate as promised by God Himself as Israel turned to other gods.

^{AU} **1 Kings 9:7** then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name,

I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples.

^{NAU} **Jeremiah 22:5** "But if you will not obey these words, I swear by Myself," declares the LORD, "that this house will become a desolation.""

Jesus Himself announced the final judgment of this promise during His earthly ministry.

Luke 13:35 ³⁵ "Behold, your house is left to you *desolate*; and I say to you, you will not see Me until *the time* comes when you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

And so, when we discuss the inheritance and the promises given to Abraham it is essential to understand what Abraham understood about those promises and what the holy dough represents in those promises accepted by faith.

Galatians 3:17-18 ¹⁷ What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

Well, what did God grant to Abraham by a promise? Two things, both related to a called out people. One thing was the establishment of a physical nation from the loins of Abraham that would be a shadow, like the law, of the intended eternal promise and people found in the redeemer and the inheritance He would secure for His elect people in Christ, which is the second and primary thing intended.

This is why Abraham was not disappointed *not* to realize this Promised Land that he wandered in most of his life. He understood the true promise of the inheritance being that which was eternal in nature.

Hebrews 11:8-10 ⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the

same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

And so, to suggest that the holy lump and root that Paul speaks of in our text is primarily the physical seed of Abraham is to miss the argument that he has been making throughout most of this letter.

Romans 9:6-8 ⁶ But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For *they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;* ⁷ *nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants,* but: "THROUGH ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED." ⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

But on the same note Paul cautions us not to think that God cannot graciously graft back into the root a remnant of the very people who were condemned for rejecting the root.

Romans 11:5 ⁵ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice.

Romans 11:7 ⁷ What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

And so, Paul is saying that the nation of Israel has not obtained the eternal promises given to Abraham, but there will be a remnant who will and these are the branches that will be grafted back into the root which is holy.

Romans 11:16 ¹⁶ If the first piece *of dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.

The branches can only be holy if they are connected to the root who is holy. If the holy root is talking about Abraham, the man of faith, then all who are connected to Abraham in this sense, are also holy.

Romans 4:13 ¹³ For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Galatians 3:7 ⁷ Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

Also, the root must be an inference to the Messiah in whom Abraham believed, and only those who are in the root can be

considered holy which by default excludes all men outside of Christ, both Jew and Gentile.

Galatians 3:16 ¹⁶ Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

Abraham was connected to the root in Christ who is the true seed of Abraham thus establishing the connection of the root or vine to the branches.

This is the point that Jesus was making when he used a similar metaphor to the root and the branches by substituting "the vine" for the "root" wherein only those branches connected to the source of life can have life.

John 15:4-6 ⁴ "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me. ⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶ "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

Only those branches that are connected to the vine or the root will live and only those branches can be considered holy as they are attached to the holy root. And only those branches are considered to be the true children of Abraham who was a true child of God by faith.

Romans 4:16 ¹⁶ For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, ***who is the father of us all,***

Here the reference to Abraham being the father of us all is to his spiritual descendants being holy as unto the Lord through faith. In this sense he is the root, not to a physical nation as it relates to the elect, but to a holy nation which includes both Jew and Gentile.

1 Peter 2:9 ⁹ But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A **HOLY NATION**, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Galatians 3:7-9 ⁷ Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU."* ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

Paul's analogy of Israel being branches which were broken off and the Gentiles being grafted in is one way of saying that Israel has been cut off from the blessings of God. In God's mercy He has grafted in a people who once were not His people and they now share in the blessings which were intended for Israel but which Israel has relinquished because of unbelief.

Again, Paul's point is that precisely because of their rejection of God Israel was placed to the side by God so that you and I, as Gentiles, might come to God and the promise of eternal life given to the fathers, or patriarchs.

Paul brought that out earlier in Rom 11:11 "Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious."

But Paul wants the Gentiles to understand that God is still working with the Jews and therefore they should not despise the Jews, even though most of the Jews have despised God. Again, God's mercy and grace are seen here in a most amazing way.

Rom 11:18 "do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you."

Now, we know that the ultimate "Root" is Jesus Christ as our Lord tells us in Rev 22:16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

But, in Romans, Paul is keeping with his analogy of Abraham being the root from which "The Root" would come. In other words, there is a sense in which the physical root plays a vital role as Israel is God's means by which the Messiah would be brought into this world. Paul is reminding the Gentiles that without the nation of Israel salvation would not be possible for the Gentile world, according to God's will.

Jesus spoke of this in Joh 4:22 "You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews."

And so, Paul wants the Gentiles to keep God's promises, which came through the Jews, in perspective and despite how Israel presently despises God we should not despise the Jews because God still has many of them set apart to carry on the faith of their fathers who placed their faith in God and in the Messiah.

For that reason don't look down with scorn on the Jews. That doesn't mean we accept their sinful behavior towards God any more than we would accept sinful behavior in our own ranks, but we shouldn't have an attitude towards the Jews as vermin, which the rest of the world has done for centuries.

In fact, one of the greatest testimonies that God is not done with the Jews is the fact that they still exist as a distinct people despite how the world has persecuted them to the point of seemingly total extinction at times in history.

And yet they always bounce back. Why? Because they're so resilient and they have such perseverance? No! It's because God's gracious hand is still grafting in many of the native branches until He comes back.

We should never become arrogant to the Jews. Our salvation came through the Jews. Jesus was a Jew in the flesh. And so Paul continues this thought in our text.

Rom 11:19-21 "You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." 20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either."

We stand by faith in Christ. There is nothing in us which God found lovely. We can't say that the Jew was no longer accepted because he lost his loveliness and now we have it.

Neither Jew nor Gentile have had God's grace extended to him based on their loveliness or wonderful character. Grace would cease to be grace if that were the case. And so, Paul wants us to consider with sober understanding that Israel as a nation may have been rejected for unbelief but the same thing could happen to those in the church who have no faith in Christ.

One might say, how can a person in the church of Jesus Christ not be a child of God? For exactly the same reason Paul states in Rom 9:8 "In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."

No one was automatically guaranteed salvation in Israel simply because he or she was a Jew. Like Abraham, they had to live by faith in the promises of God. And so, just because one belongs to the church does not guarantee that one is saved. It is only by faith in Christ that one may have eternal life.

And this was a problem that the early church was confronted with. In fact, Jesus Himself speaks to the major churches of that day in the book of Revelation and He begins by addressing the church at Ephesus.

Rev 2:1-5 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. ***If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.***"

We must never take the attitude that now that "I'm in", so to speak, I can never be cut off. No, Paul says, 'if you think that your relationship with God is something which can be taken for granted and that you don't have to live by faith then think again, because that kind of arrogant attitude will reveal itself as a life which never truly was by faith.'

Faith always reveals itself in gratitude towards God and never forgets where it came from and that it was all grace, all God. In many parts of the world today, "the church" is no more representative of Jesus Christ than Buddhism. Just look at some of the major denominations. Many deny the deity of Jesus Christ or huge portions of the Word of God.

Much of what is referred to as Christianity is nothing more than man's attempt to carry on a relationship with the one true God

through worldly and fleshly means, not by faith in the Messiah alone.

We could do a whole study on this, but, we've got to move on.

Rom 11:22-24 "Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. 23 And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!"

In other words, God's kindness and sternness, or severity as it's translated in the NAS and KJV, is seen at one and the same place. Those who reject the Messiah will taste the judgment from God for rejection. Those who embrace the Messiah will taste His kindness, His goodness, His salvation.

And though Israel has been cut off, many of the Jews are able to be grafted back in by faith. That's what Paul means when he says, "if they do not continue in unbelief." But notice what Paul says in verse 23, "God is able to graft them in again."

It's not as though Israel will one day figure it out and then decide it would be a good idea to accept Jesus. God is the one who will move the heart of many Jews, who will then accept Christ by faith, and in that sense God will be the One responsible for grafting the natural branches back into their own olive tree.

Rom 11:25-27 "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. 27 And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." [Isaiah 59:20,21; 27:9; Jer. 31:33,34]

Just as God had always intended to include the Gentiles in the blessings of God by faith, (even though this was a mystery in the sense that it wasn't fully understood how they fit into the scheme of things), so too it was a mystery as to how Israel, who had been cut off by God because of their unbelief, would somehow be grafted back in.

But Paul says, 'I don't want you Gentiles to be ignorant of how God is planning to work with Israel.' And the reason he makes this point is so that the Gentiles won't be wise in their own eyes as to what God would do with the Jews.

It would be very easy to take their own understanding and conclude that Israel was completely out of the picture. But Paul says this mystery is that there is a partial hardening, which infers that there will be a part of the nation that will return as God grafts part of Israel back into the root. And the Gentiles play a part in this mystery to the extent that when the fullness of the Gentiles is completed in God's sovereign plan, then all Israel will be saved.

We are going to look more closely at this phrase, "All Israel will be saved," next week. But in closing today we should note that this statement is on the heels of the previous verse where Paul says, "Israel has experienced a hardening in part *until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.*"

When does the "full number of the Gentiles has come in", mean?

In a passage related to the destruction of Jerusalem Jesus makes this statement regarding the times of the Gentiles being fulfilled.

Luke 21:24 ²⁴ and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Notice that Jesus says that *Jerusalem will be trampled under foot "until" the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*

Well, Jerusalem was completely destroyed by the Gentiles, that is the Romans, in AD 70. How is it then that Jerusalem will continue to be trampled under foot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled, unless the times of the Gentiles is continuing?

And if that is the case then what Jerusalem is being referred to that is still being trampled under foot?

This is where it's important to understand the covenant relationship that God has with both Jew and Gentile in Christ; that is the New Covenant which points to a heavenly citizenship that both Jew and Gentile enjoy.

And where do both Jew and Gentile reside in this new covenant? In the heavenly Jerusalem.

Hebrews 12:22-24 ²² But you have come to *Mount Zion* and to the *city of the living God*, the *heavenly Jerusalem*, and to myriads of angels, ²³ to the *general assembly* and *church of the firstborn* who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel.

Holy Jerusalem still exists in the sense that it is the residence of all true believers and so this is a reference to the present manifestation of that Jerusalem that the writer of Hebrews identifies as “the *general assembly and church* of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven...

It is this Jerusalem that the world-at-large, (identified with the Gentiles), which is currently being trampled under foot. And if you don't think that's the case then take a quick look around the world to see how the church of Jesus Christ is being despised and how many Christians are being martyred for their faith, and how many inside the church are wolves in sheep's clothing trying to undermine the truth of the gospel.

How long will this go on? Until the fullness of the Gentiles has been completed. And when will this be? Jesus identifies this back in Luke.

Luke 21:24-28and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. ²⁵ "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ ***Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory.*** ²⁸ "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

The times are clear as to when the fullness of the Gentiles has come because it is associated with the return of Jesus Christ coming on the clouds.

Revelation 1:4-7 ⁴ John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us

and released us from our sins by His blood-- ⁶ and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father-- to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. ⁷ **BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS**, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

This return of Jesus is also identified as the day of the Lord or the day of God in judgment when our great God shall make all things new as He destroys this present earth and out of it creates the new heavens and new earth.

2 Peter 3:10-13 ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

It is on this same last day that God will raise His people to new life in the resurrection.

John 6:40 ⁴⁰ "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

When will the fullness of the Gentiles come in; that day in which God's plan of redemption is completed, where He delivers all His people, both Jew and Gentile to the New Jerusalem?

On the last day. And it will be on the last day that God will exclaim, "And all Israel will be saved."

We'll pick up on that thought next week.