

# Romans (11:16-21)

## *Grafted In*

Part 53 – November 6, 2005

### ROMAN REVIEW

Last time, we read Jesus' parable about the vineyard, where he warned that: The Kingdom of God will be given to a people who will produce its fruit. (*Matthew 21:43*)

We saw that true faith will appeal rather than repel. This is because God's Spirit produces *envious* "fruit" in us, which defuse defenses, and cause people to desire what we have.

Let's review what Paul has been saying lately:

- Israel is disobedient and contrary to God. (*Rom 10:21*)
- Despite this, God has not rejected Israel. (*Rom 11:1*)
- However their hearts have become hardened. (*Rom 11:7*)
- Their hardness took salvation to Gentiles. (*Rom 11:11*)
- And now, Israel's envy will draw her back. (*Rom 11:15*)

Q: But, why is it taking God so long?

We ended on Paul's proclamation:

What will [Israel's] acceptance be but life from the dead? – *Romans 11:15 NIV*

Q: Did Paul really think it was going to take 2000 years?!

Well, he warned that it could – in a parallel to Jesus' vineyard parable – an elaborate analogy about grafted olive branches.

If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. – *Romans 11:16-21 NIV*

## HOLY ROOTS!

Earlier in Romans Paul strongly opposed Jewish arrogance against Gentiles ... now he opposes Gentile arrogance against Jews.

After all, if God is going to use the Gentiles to woo the Jew back into his Kingdom ... Gentiles will need a proper perspective.

If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy (11:16a)

This is a reference to a practice (*Num 15:20*) of offering a portion of dough to the Lord in order to bless the whole batch.

... if the root is holy, so are the branches (11:16b)

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the patriarchs of the Jewish (and Christian) faiths. They are the “firstfruits” and the “roots”.

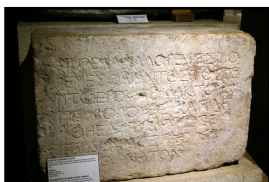
- And the promises they were given have not been canceled.

So, to dishonor or disrespect a Jew (saved or not) is to show contempt for God’s covenant promises to the fathers of *our* faith.

Now let’s break down the imagery of Paul’s metaphor:

- The **olive tree** itself represents all of salvation history.
- The **root** is the patriarchs who hold the covenant promises.
- The **broken branches** are Jews who continue to reject Jesus.
- The **grafted branches** are Gentiles who have received Jesus.
- The **nourishing sap** is acceptance and access for a Gentile.

Along with all Christ-trusting Jews, Gentiles are the true Israel and heirs of all the covenant promises of salvation.



The temple was surrounded by a “balustrade” (dividing wall) which the ancient Jewish historian Josephus wrote had warnings posted to keep Gentiles out. Archaeologists have unearthed one! It reads: “No foreigner is to go beyond the balustrade ... whoever is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his death which will follow.”

When Paul described the relationship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians (to the Ephesians) he said:

For [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, **the dividing wall** of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. - *Ephesians 2:14-15 NIV*

Through Christ, Jew *and* Gentile have access to God.

Okay, the root represents God's covenant promises. The broken branches are the Jews who've rejected. The grafted branches are Gentiles who've received. And the nourishing sap is the Gentile's access to God.

Now let's read Paul's analogy again:

If some of the **branches** have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been **grafted** in among the others and now share in the nourishing **sap** from the olive **root**, do not boast over those **branches**. - *Romans 11:17-18a NIV*

Do not boast over those branches!



Remember the parable of the Prodigal Son? And how Jesus likened the resentment of the Jews to the brother who refused to come into the celebration, even though his father went out and pleaded with him?

Far from feeling superior, our attitude (as received Gentiles) should reflect the Prodigal's Father: "Come into the celebration! You belong inside!" And as his son might add: "More than I do!"

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

Paul is hitting this Gentile issue hard: The *Jewish* root (the *Jewish* fathers), the *Jewish* Scripture, the *Jewish* promises, the *Jewish* history, the *Jewish* Messiah supports you, and not the other way around.

- Becoming a Christian *means* becoming a true Jew

Being a Gentile Christian is all about being grafted (received and accepted) into the *Jewish* covenant.

Anti-Semitism, in any form, proves that we don't know who we are in Christ. Or more so, that we're *not* who we say we are.

Paul more than sensed the Gentile's propensity for prejudice.

You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” (11:19)

Paul would be saddened that we’re approaching 2000 years (and counting), but I doubt he’d be surprised.

- God isn’t dragging his feet ... He’s patiently waiting.

He’s held this little nation together – miraculously – for two millennia ... so we could make ‘em envious of our faith.

Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith  
(11:20a)

We got in by faith. We stay in by faith. And faith in Christ is the only link to the covenant promises of God.

And because of faith’s nature and origin, it cannot boast.

Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. (11:20b)

- Saving faith rules out spiritual arrogance

God commissioned the Jews to be His ambassadors to the world, to draw them in and prepare them for the Messiah – and the Jews became arrogant and failed to win over the Gentiles.

So God gave the responsibility to His church, and said: “Be My ambassadors to the Jews ... and woo them back to Me.”

And many in the church became arrogant and ended up persecuting the very people they were supposed to make envious!

- Many Jews still see the cross as a symbol of hatred!

It’s only been since WWII with the extremes of the holocaust, that blatant anti-Semitism has been leaving the church.

And we’re watching it happen! And this is spectacular ...

For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. (11:21)

Q: So, how do we keep from getting ourselves *pruned*?

- We just saw a clue when Paul said: “Be afraid.”
- The answer is in the very next verse next week!