

Israel, the Gentiles, and an Olive Tree—Part 1
Romans 11:16-24
October 20, 2021

Review and Context

Theme of Romans: The gospel of God (1:16-17)

Chs 9-11 The gospel and Israel

- In 9:1-5, the apostle in a very personal way introduced the problem (from the human standpoint) of Israel's unbelief (rejection of the Messiah)

- *Thesis:* 9:6a "But it is not as though the word of God has failed."
 - The OT's numerous promises to the nation of Israel, of spiritual salvation through the Messiah

 - Examples include Deut 30:6; Eze 36:24-28; Jer 31:31-36; Zech 12:10-13:1

- The apostle proves that the word of God has not failed, using five arguments that center on the following:
 1. God's sovereign election of some individuals and not others (9:6b-29)
 2. Israel's reliance on works rather than faith (9:30-10:21).
 - Israel is responsible for their failure to believe in Christ
 3. The remnant of believers within Israel (11:1-10)
 4. God's temporary rejection of Israel (11:11-24)
 5. Israel's future salvation (11:25-32)

Some branches (unbelieving Israelites) were broken off, and wild branches (believing Gentiles) were grafted in (16-22)

verse 16

1. Transition between paragraphs

2. Continues the thought of the previous paragraph, which taught the temporary nature of God's rejection of Israel, and His purpose in it (**vv 11-15**)

"If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump"

1. Alludes to **Num. 15:17-21** "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land to which I bring you and when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall present a contribution to the LORD. Of the first of your dough you shall present a loaf as a contribution; like a contribution from the threshing floor, so shall you present it. Some of the first of your dough you shall give to the LORD as a contribution throughout your generations."

2. Likens Israel's believing remnant (11:5) to firstfruits

3. Teaches that Israel as a whole has been set apart for the Lord's special purposes

“and if the root is holy, so are the branches.”

1. Introduces the metaphor that dominates the paragraph
2. As we will see, the root represents the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and these natural branches represent Israel
3. Like the previous metaphor, teaches that Israel as a whole has been set apart for the Lord's special purposes
4. Israel's stumbling is not a permanent fall (11:11)

Question: What are the imperatives (commands) in this passage? Who is being commanded here?

vv 17-18a

“the nourishing root of the olive tree”

1. This root represents the covenant God made with the patriarchs
 - The metaphor of a root was repeatedly used in Jewish literature in reference to Abraham and the other patriarchs¹
 - 11:28 (cf. 9:4-5)
 - A covenant that promised personal (Abraham), national (Israel), and international blessings (Gentiles), and both physical and spiritual blessings
2. The olive tree was the most widely cultivated fruit tree in the Mediterranean world
3. The olive tree represents the sphere of God's blessings stemming from the Abrahamic covenant. It can be seen as the people of God in the broadest sense of the term—a people spanning both ages of salvation history, and including both Jews and Gentiles.

“if some of the branches were broken off”

1. The natural branches represent the Jews
2. Some (all but the remnant mentioned in 11:5) were severed from the blessings through their unbelief (11:20) and God's hardening (11:7-10)

¹ Michael J. Vlach, contributor to *Three Views on Israel and the Church: Perspectives on Romans 9-11*, 45.

“you, although a wild olive shoot”

1. Gentile believers (11:13a)
2. Not part of the cultivated olive tree
3. Wild olive trees were notoriously unfruitful

“were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree”

1. Gentile believers share in the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant (and New Covenant)
2. 15:27 (context is 25-27)

18a “do not be arrogant toward the branches.”

1. Gentile believers are forbidden from being arrogant toward Jews (unbelieving and believing)
2. Jews were arrogant toward Gentiles, proud of their privileged position (2:17-24)
3. In Rome there was widespread contempt for the Jews. They had been banished from Rome for several years.

18b “If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.”

1. Your very spiritual existence depends on the Jewish root, on promises God gave to the Jewish patriarchs, a root that naturally belongs to the Jews (9:4-5)
2. You owe your spiritual life to the Jewish heritage

vv 19-20

1. Faith is incompatible with pride
2. The reason Israel was put to the side was not that we Gentiles were better. We were not.
3. Gentiles have been grafted in by sovereign grace
4. The doctrine Paul is teaching should cultivate a deeper humility in our hearts
5. Verse 25 will speak again against pride
6. In God’s great plan of salvation, He leaves no room for boasting in self, and He receives all the glory (3:26-27; 4:2-3)
7. “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5)

Question: Verse 20 instructs us to fear. What are we to fear? Why are we to fear this?