

Session 63: The Two Olive Trees

(Note: Mike refers to this under the old system as Establishment, Part 8, Session 63)

- Romans 11:1-10: Israel's present status
- Romans 11:11-15: Israel's stumble, fall, diminishing and fullness
- Romans 11:16-24: Branches and Warnings
- Romans 11:25-29: Israel's future
- Romans 11:30-36: Our godly thinking

Romans 11:16 *For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.* ¹⁷ *And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;* ¹⁸ *Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.* ¹⁹ *Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.* ²⁰ *Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest 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 shalt be cut off.* ²³ *And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.* ²⁴ *For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert 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?*

We now want to focus on verse 17.

Romans 11:16 *For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.*

Romans 11:13 *For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:* ¹⁴ *If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.* ¹⁵ *For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?*

Romans 11:16 *For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.* ¹⁷ *And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of*

the root and fatness of the olive tree; ¹⁸Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.

We identify the pronouns:

- Thou – Gentiles in general
- Them – believing Israel

We identify the branches:

- Broken off branches – unbelieving Israel
- Branches in the wild olive tree – Gentiles

Romans 11:18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. ¹⁹Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. ²⁰Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: ²¹For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

I see the broken off branches as unbelieving Israel and the branches left in the tree would be the saved members of the little flock. Remember that when Paul writes Romans, he is smack in the middle of his Acts transition ministry. He is preaching Christ to unbelieving Israel and establishing Gentile churches.

The breaking off of the branches (unsaved Israel) constitutes the removal of Israel in the national sense. They no longer occupy that favored nation status among the nations of the world. As a nation, Israel has been “cast away” which would necessitate the cessation of the prophetic program.

The Gentiles are the branches in the “wild olive tree” in verse 17. The wild olive tree is uncultivated: alone in the wild and not cared for. In that condition, it cannot produce fruit that is acceptable to God.

To demonstrate just how far off from God we were in “time past,” Paul writes that our natural status of being Gentiles was that of being “children of wrath” and “children of disobedience.”

Ephesians 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: ³Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

As you can see, we not only were children of disobedience and wrath, but we cooperated with Satan's plan of evil which was working in the world.

Paul further writes in Ephesians that we Gentiles were without Christ and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.

Ephesians 2:11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; ¹² That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

First, I want us to see that we Gentiles were 'alienated' from the commonwealth of Israel. Being an alien means that one has no connection at all with something; in this case, with the "commonwealth of Israel."

What is a commonwealth?

Most people understand a commonwealth to be: 'the whole body of people constituting a nation or state, especially viewed as a body in which the whole people have a voice or interest.'

By that definition, Paul is saying in Ephesians 2:12 that we Gentiles had no connection (aliens) to the nation of Israel (commonwealth).

While that is completely true, there is another definition that also fits what Paul is saying. This definition adds a shade of meaning more than just saying that as Gentiles we had no connection to Israel.

The word "commonwealth" is made of two words. Therefore, to get to the primary definition, break the word "commonwealth" down into its two main parts and think about what those words mean when they are put together.

Space for personal reflection and notes

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Commonwealth is made of two words:

1. common – belonging equally to all
2. wealth – abounding in something that is valuable

Oxford English Dictionary:

Commonwealth: Public welfare: general good or advantage, prosperity of the community.

Think of it as the wealth that everyone had in common because they were part of the nation of Israel.

Did an Israelite, in time past, enjoy any advantage over Gentiles?

Paul raises this very question in Romans 3.

Romans 3:1 *What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? ² Much every way...*

Notice Paul's answer started out with: "Much every way:"

What does that mean? It means that the Jew had the advantage over the Gentile in just about every way you can imagine.

Then notice that Paul highlights the chief reason the Jew had the advantage.

Romans 3:1 *What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? ² Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.*

All we have to do is look in Ephesians 4 to see what that alienation includes.

Ephesians 4:17 *This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, ¹⁸ Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:*

We were alienated from the life of God. We had no connection with God. In time past we were not among those with whom God was dealing or working.

Let us return to Ephesians 2 and look at the other phrase "ye were without Christ."

Ephesians 2:11 *Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; ¹² That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:*

In time past we were “without Christ.” That was not simply describing the fact that Gentiles did not hear about him, or that they heard about him, and they did not believe in him.

That phrase “without Christ” was describing the limited audience to whom Christ was sent. It meant that Christ did not come for the purpose of manifesting himself to Gentiles. Christ did not come with a message or gospel to Gentiles. Christ did not receive a commission from his Father to preach to Gentiles.

The main purpose of Christ’s earthly ministry was to Israel. The only two times that Jesus did something with a Gentile was for the purpose of furthering the Jews understanding of his ministry to them.

Because the natural condition of a Gentile was to be unconnected to Israel’s commonwealth, we are also “without Christ.” Christ’s coming was part of the ‘wealth’ of Israel, was it not?

Before we leave this issue of Gentiles being “without Christ,” I want us to look at a few scriptures that indicate the restricted audience Jesus was sent to minister.

Matthew 15:24 *But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

We see it again as Christ calls his disciples and gives them instructions as to whom they will carry the gospel of the kingdom.

Matthew 10:5 *These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:*

And finally, we see it in Paul’s writings as he identifies the audience for whom Christ came being Israel, not Gentiles.

Romans 9:4 *Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; ⁵ Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.*

As you can see, Christ did not come for the Gentiles. When we understand our “time past” condition and standing as Gentiles, then our appreciation for what God has done in setting aside his program with Israel, instituting a dispensation of Gentile grace, appointing an apostle for us

Gentiles, and having scriptures written which are specifically to us and about us as members of Christ's body, that understanding should create a gratitude and an additional aspect of love for our heavenly Father as his sons and daughters.

Romans 11:17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;

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Now let us return to Romans 11:17.

Romans 11:17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;

Let us be clear about the terminology being used here. What does it mean to be “broken off?” It means several things:

1. God is no longer dealing with Israel on a national basis,
2. Israel’s relationship with God has changed,
3. It means that Israel’s previous status in that relationship has also changed.

Nationally, Israel fell to the level of the other nations of the world. The outworking of the prophetic program stopped. Prophecies are no longer being fulfilled. The kingdom has been postponed. The gospel of the kingdom is no longer the gospel for Israel.

The unsaved portion of the nation is no longer enjoying the “goodness” of God by means of the special access which they previously enjoyed in their program.

Romans 11:25 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 fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

Now, we Gentiles, who were without access before, are enjoying full access to God along with the goodness of God’s mercy.

What we are after here is to establish that the ‘breaking off of the branches’ has to do with Israel’s fall: i.e., the severing of the national relationship, the cessation of the prophetic program, and a change in status: “cast away.”

Romans 9:26 And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

Romans 11:17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;

Who is the “thou” in verse 17? If you recall in verse 13, Paul is now talking to Gentiles in general. Therefore, the “thou” is Gentiles. Not just saved Gentiles, but Gentiles in general.

Romans 11:11 I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

All Gentiles are grafted into the olive tree during this dispensation of Gentile grace. Again, we have to remember that for Gentiles, being grafted into the tree does not make us saved; it gives us access to God, and it makes us the recipient of his goodness, it makes us part of the group that God is working with, and it offers salvation.

It is important to understand that being grafted in or broken off of the olive tree is not talking about the receiving or losing of our salvation. A branch is broken off of the tree because of unbelief.

Romans 11:20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:

This leads us to understand that it was those who did not believe that were “broken off.” Well, let us talk about that. Cannot a Jew still have an opportunity to be saved today? The answer is “yes.”

But generally speaking, the presentation of the gospel to Israel produced a hardness of heart and blindness to those who rejected the truth. Is that blindness irreversible – of course not. Is it possible that one of those Israelites who rejected Jesus during his public ministry and rejected him again during the extension of mercy, could hear Paul’s message, be saved and become a member of the body of Christ? Yes, it is.

By the same token, a Gentile, who was part of the “wild olive tree,” could believe in Israel’s God and be saved as a proselyte. But the issue here is that both of those are the exception and not the rule.

Often, people misunderstand Paul’s illustration. Be careful, even though Paul is talking to Gentiles, by talking about Gentiles being grafted into the tree, he is not talking about Gentile’s being saved.

The conclusion we need to come to in this is that the branches being broken off are not about anyone losing their salvation.

What Paul is talking about is the fact that we Gentiles are being favorably treated by God right now. As we will see, that is not a permanent situation which will continue on forever.

We will define the Olive Tree.

The olive tree is not Israel. The branches which were broken off have to do with unsaved Israel, but the tree itself is not Israel. Before I elaborate on that point, let me also say that the significance to Paul's 'tree' illustration is not in the fact that he uses an "olive" tree. Paul could have used any tree to make this illustration.

Let me give you an example. Take a look at Matthew 24.

As a context, Jesus is talking about the events that will precede his coming at the great and terrible day of the LORD. Matthew 24:30-31 speaks of his coming.

Then, in verse 32, we have a return for detail about how things will be just prior to the Lord's return.

Matthew 24:32 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: ³³ So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. ³⁴ Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

Many prophecy preachers get carried away with the use of the "fig tree" and they try to attach a meaning to every part of verse 32. They do this in order to pin down the time of the Lord's return. Part of the problem lies in the confusion of the returns (rapture and advent). Another part of the problem lies in trying to assign an exact meaning beyond the writer's intention.

The "fig tree" they say, is Israel. "Putting forth leaves," they say, is when Israel became a nation. Then, they take that and put it with verses 33-34 and say that the generation that sees Israel become a nation will see the Lord return.

But what is it really saying? It is saying something that everyone knows, when the fig tree starts putting forth leaves (which it begins to do sometime in the spring) then you know that summer is nigh (or, summer is approaching).

Then, putting that together with the next verses, you have this understanding: just like when you see the fig tree put out leaves, you know that summer is approaching, when you see all of the aforementioned events in Matthew 24, then you know that the return of the Son of man is approaching too.

Here is my question: If that is the meaning of the passage, then could not any tree have been used for the illustration? Do not they all put forth leaves when summer is approaching? The answer is: yes, any tree could have been used. Why did Matthew pick the fig tree? Answer: he just picked one they were familiar with.

Let me show you why I say that it could have been any tree; because, Luke said it could have been any tree to make the illustration work. The context of Luke 21 is the same as that of

Matthew 24. You can go look for yourself. For the sake of our study, we will take up Luke's record of the parable in verse 29.

Luke 21:29 *And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; ³⁰ When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. ³¹ So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. ³² Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.*

Do you see my point?

I am not saying the scripture does not represent things about Israel in other places by the use of the fig, olive, and vine trees. It does. But this is not what Paul is after in Romans 11. In this case, like Matthew and Luke, any tree could have been used to make the point.

In Romans 11, any tree could be used to create the 'grafting' illustration. (I have a gala apple tree in my yard that has three other types of apple branches grafted onto it.) Do not get so hung up on trying to figure out why Paul used the olive tree, because that is not the main focus of the verses.

The focus is on the 'breaking off' of some branches, the grafting in of other branches, and the eventual grafting back in of the original branches. The main purpose of the illustration is to demonstrate that it is just as easy for God to stop what he is doing with national Israel in order to show mercy and goodness to Gentiles for a time, while still intending to return to deal with national Israel, resume their program and complete his purpose.

Romans 11:23 *And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.*