

God Prunes and Grafts

Key Verse: “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.”
—Romans 11:22

Selected Scripture:
Romans 11:11-24

International Version) This plain statement is one of many which points to the fact that Israel will share in God’s blessings to all the families of the earth.—Gen. 12:3; 22:18

Although Paul’s purpose in our lesson is to show the importance of the Gentiles in God’s plan, he still greatly desired that his Jewish brethren would become consecrated followers of Christ. Earlier, Paul spoke of “great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart,” wishing that he could trade places with his kinsmen if they would only accept Christ. (Rom. 9:1-5) However, their lack of faith in God’s promised spiritual blessings caused Israel, as a nation, to be cast away from their favored position.

In our lesson, Paul likens Israel’s casting away to

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Roman Jews up to this point, Paul now turns his attention to the Roman Gentiles. Israel, as a nation, had “stumbled” by not accepting their opportunity as a nation to become members of the New Creation. (Rom. 11:9,11) However, Paul says their stumbling is temporary. “I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.” (Rom. 11:1,2, *New*

branches being broken off an olive tree. (Rom. 11:17) The Law was a schoolmaster that should have led the Jews to Christ, but when Christ came they rejected him. (Gal. 3:24; Isa. 53:3; Luke 9:22) After being rejected by his own people, Jesus declared that they were cast off from divine favor. (Matt. 23:37,38) The “breaking off” of the branches which followed came to every Jew who refused to accept Jesus as their Messiah. Yet, Paul insists Israel’s fall from God’s favor was more a blessing to the Gentiles than a permanent injury to Israel.—Rom. 11:25-28

Once the natural “branches” had been broken off, there was room for “wild” branches—Gentiles—to be grafted in to take their place. These new branches would immediately partake of the holy root of the tree. (vs. 17) Those thus grafted have become sharers in the original root of divine favor promised in the Abrahamic Covenant, for it is God’s purpose to have a heavenly family drawn from among mankind—Jews and Gentiles alike.—Eph. 1:3-12

As grafted branches, Paul warns us not to “boast against the branches” which were broken off. We are to humbly remember we did not bring into being the “root” of the Abrahamic promise. Rather, the promises made to Abraham have, by faith, allowed us to partake of its “root and fatness.” (Rom. 11:17,18) Furthermore, just as Israel was broken off due to unbelief, we might be treated likewise if we are not faithful to our call. We have the same standard of love to meet that was the basis of the Law. Thus, Paul says, “Be not highminded, but fear.”—vss. 20,21

In our Key Verse, Paul speaks concerning an important transition in God’s plan. Because of Israel’s continual disobedience to God’s Law, which they had promised to keep, they experienced “the severity of God,” when he broke them off from his favor. At the same time, we see “the goodness . . . of God” in giving his favor to new Gentile branches, who will eventually become part of the bride of Christ, to live and reign with him.—Rev. 20:4,6 ■