

Grafted into the Olive Tree

Key Verse: *“Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.”*

—**Romans 11:18**

Selected Scripture:
Romans 11:11-24

THE PICTURE THAT GOD

gives us through the Apostle Paul in today’s lesson identifies the nation of Israel as representing the trunk and the branches of an olive tree. The root of the tree fittingly denotes the promise which God previously made to the fathers of the Jewish nation —Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

“In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”—Gen. 28:14

God did not explain the details of his plan to the Israelites, but he did invite them to enter into a covenant with him. If they would obey and keep his covenant, they would be a “peculiar treasure, ... a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” Their response to this was, “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.” (Exod. 19:5-8) Based on this positive response, the Jewish nation was joined in covenant relationship to God, which constituted them the figurative olive tree that grew out of the root of the Abrahamic promise, of which Paul speaks.

Although Israel was the natural seed of Abraham, God’s eternal purpose was to develop a spiritual seed, which Paul says was Christ. (Gal. 3:16) The Jewish nation did not recognize this, nor did they accept Jesus as their Messiah

when he came. Rather, they were still hoping that the promises made to Abraham would be fulfilled through the covenant given in Moses' day. Late in his ministry, Paul spoke of this, saying, "Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come."—Acts 26:7

When the nation of Israel rejected Jesus, God's special favor to them came to an end. The Lord said that, as a nation, they would become desolate. (Isa. 53:3; Matt. 23:38; Luke 23:20,21; Rom. 9:30-33) As branches in the symbolic olive tree, they had failed to bring forth proper fruitage, and thus were cut off from the root of promise. Thus Paul said, "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for."—Rom. 11:7

God, however, had not made his promises in vain. He desired a spiritual seed to be developed from the root of the promises made to Abraham. These "Israelites indeed" would take the place of the broken-off branches of the fleshly house. When the Israelites as a people were proven unworthy of becoming heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant, they were broken off and Gentiles began to be grafted to the root. As Paul further testifies, the Gentiles would now have the privilege of partaking of the "root and fatness of the olive tree." (Rom. 11:17) Individual Jews, too, would still have the opportunity, "if they abide not still in unbelief," to be grafted back in to the olive tree root.—vs. 23

All those who, by faith, "have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." There is now no distinction between Jew and Gentile among those who have been grafted into the olive tree, and who are partaking of the richness of God's promises. (Gal. 3:26-28) These all must be humble, however, as our Key Verse states. Our standing before God is not in our own strength as branches, but in the root—God's promises as provided in his Word. If, based on this, we truly belong to Christ, then we are part of "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."—vs. 29 ■