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The Illustration of Isra'el's Future

11: 16-24

The illustration of Isra'el's future DIG: What agricultural imagery does Paul use to demonstrate that God's setting aside of Isra'el is not a permanent condition? Who are the challah and the firstfruits? What does the olive tree illustrate? The roots and the branches? How can Gentiles be arrogant? Why does Romans 11 apply to the Church today?

REFLECT: How have the Gentiles been arrogant? What modern illustration would serve as an equivalent to the grated olive tree? Where would you fit within this new analogy? Who do you think is included in the phrase, "All Isra'el shall be saved?" Why are Gentiles tempted to be arrogant toward the Jews? How is this still true in the world today?

Paul warns the Gentiles not to boast over the fall of the majority of Jews, because the Gentiles are merely grafted into the cultivated olive tree, or Isra'el.

An illustration: The metaphor of **the olive tree**, beloved of Messianic **Jews** everywhere, extends to **verse 24** but is introduced by a different image, taken from **Numbers 15:20-21**. **Now if the challah offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf (11:16a)**. Today, **challah** means the special braided loaves of bread served in homes on Shabbat and during festivals. In the Bible, the word describes a small "cake" baked from dough set aside for **God**; this must be done first (hence the term **firstfruits**). Only afterwards may **the loaf** made from dough be eaten, so that **the loaf** is then "holy" in the sense of being usable at all. **Talmud tractate Challah gives the details of this procedure.**²⁹⁸



Then, **Paul** switches to another illustration, that of **the olive tree**. **And if the root is holy, so are the branches (11:16b)**. **But if some of the natural branches**, that is, individual **Jews** but not the whole **nation of Isra'el**, **were broken off** (temporarily, not permanently! See **11:11-12** and **23-24**), set aside from being eligible to receive what **God** has promised. **And you [Gentiles] - a wild olive branch - were grafted in among [the Jews]**, among **the natural branches** that are still part of **the olive tree** (the Messianic **Jews** and the **Jewish** nation as represented by its Messianic **Jewish** community) **and have become equal sharers with them** (not replacing **the Jews**) **in the rich root of God's cultivated the olive tree (Romans 11:17)**. Now, **the natural branches** grow out of this **olive tree**, which is the place of blessing, but **the wild branches** are **grafted in** and shared in the blessing of the Covenant (see the commentary on **Jeremiah**, **to see link click [Eo](#) - The Days are Coming, declares the LORD, When I Will Make a New Covenant with the People of Isra'el**).²⁹⁹

The olive tree is an illustration of the blessings of the **Jewish** Covenants. To be **holy**, means to be set apart for the purposes of **God**. Hence, **the root** and **the challah** represent **Abraham** and **His** Covenant (see the commentary on **Genesis [Eg](#) - I am the LORD, Who Brought You Out of Ur of the Chaldeans to Give You This Land**) from which these blessings flow. **The firstfruits**, then, are **the patriarchs**, and **the branches** are individual people. **Paul** develops this figure of **roots** and **branches** so that **he** can draw a distinction between different kinds of **branches**. These **branches** can be used both individually and collectively. **Natural branches**, individually and collectively **Jews**; **wild branches**, individually and collectively **Gentiles**.

A warning: The basis of **Gentile** blessing is **faith**, not works. So, **Paul** emphasizes the need to continue in **faith** in order to be in the place of blessing. The failure of the majority of **the Jews** should be a lesson to **the wild branches**. **The natural branches** were put in the place of blessing, but were **broken off** because of **their** lack of **faith** (see the commentary

on **Jeremiah Bh - The Covenant is Broken**). In the same way, **Gentiles** can be **broken off** because of **their** lack of **faith**. **Then don't boast as if you were better than the natural branches (11:18a)**, neither **the ones** still in place (the Messianic **Jews**) nor the ones **broken off** (the non-Messianic **Jews**)! This is a pride issue! As **Paul** writes elsewhere: **After all, what makes you so special? What do you have that you didn't receive as a gift? And if in fact it was a gift, why do you boast as if it weren't (First Corinthians 4:7)?**

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Thank **You** that **You** made the way to enter **Your** holy heaven to be **faith**! Praise **You** for sending **Yeshua** to take our **sin** punishment so you could give **His** perfect righteousness to those who love and worship **You**. **He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21)**. Praise **You** that it is not by works that we are saved. **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves - it is the gift of God. It is not based on deeds, so that no one may boast (Ephesian 2:8-9)**. It is so wonderful that we can put our **trust** in a **faithful God** who is holy, loving and who never fails. **Who is like you, Lord God Almighty? You, Lord, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you (Psalms 89:8)**.*

*How I long for family and friends who are good/nice people; but who have no **faith**. They think that they can get to heaven by knowing about you and your love; but that is not **faith**, it is mere information. If someone goes to the store and sees a shirt that they like, is it theirs because they like it? Of course not! It is not theirs till they take it off the rack, or click on the picture on the internet, and purchase it. In a similar way our **faith** is what we use to purchase **God's** great offer of salvation. Taking salvation off the rack is similar to going to church, reading our Bible and praying; but the purchase is still not made. Please help these family members and friends to see how awesome you are and choose to follow you as their **Lord** and **Savior**. Then they would have **faith** as their heart attitude.*

*Please open the eyes and hearts of my family and friends so that they are willing to make **faith** to be a life-long commitment/covenant. **For if you confess with your mouth that Yeshua is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart, it is believed for righteousness, and with the mouth it is confessed for salvation. For the Scripture says: Whoever trusts in Him will not be put to shame (Romans 10:9-11)**. May they then live to please you, praying about everything. Then they will have a peace that passes all understanding. **Do not be anxious about anything - but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the shalom of God,***

which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Messiah Yeshua (Philippians 4:6-7). In Yeshua's holy name and power of resurrection. Amen

However, if you do boast, for whatever the reason - carelessness, thickheadedness, or actual hatred - **remember that you are not supporting the root, but the root is supporting you (Romans 11:18b)**. Or, to make **Paul's** point perfectly clear . . . whether the root is **Yeshua, Abraham, the Patriarchs, Messianic Jews** or the nation of **Isra'el**, it is a **Jewish root**, and don't you forget it! The non-Messianic **Jewish** community sometimes draws a picture of **the Jew** who comes to **faith in Yeshua** as someone doubly unwelcome, rejected by both the non-Messianic **Jews** and by the **Gentile** majority in the Church as well. It's easy enough to understand why a Messianic **Jew** might be rejected by some in the **Jewish** community, but why did the image of his being rejected by the Church even arise? It came from **Gentile** Christians who forgot **Paul's** warning and regarded the **Jewish** believer in their midst not as a **natural branch of the olive tree** into which they were **grafted**, but as an alien.³⁰⁰

Shifting the perspective slightly, notice that **Paul** is reminding the **Gentile** Christians that **trusting God** also means joining **God's people**. It is no different now than it was with **Ruth**, "**Your people shall be my people and your God my God**" (**Ruth 1:16**). **Gentile** Christians have joined **Isra'el**, not the reverse. **Therefore, remember your former state: you Gentiles by birth . . . had no Messiah. You were estranged from the national life of Isra'el. You were foreigners to the covenants embodying God's promise. You were in this world without hope and without God. But now, you who were once far off have been brought near through the shedding of the Messiah's blood. For He Himself is our shalom - He has made us both one and has broken down the m'chitzah, the middle wall of separation, which divides us** by destroying in His own body the enmity occasioned by the Torah, with its commands set forth in the form of mitzvot. He did this in order to create in union with Himself from the two groups a single new humanity and thus make shalom, and in order to reconcile to God both in a single body by being executed on a stake as a criminal (**Ephesians 2:11-16a**). For a **Gentile** Christian to look down on **the Jewish people** God was graciously allowed to join, is not only chutzpah and ingratitude, but also self-hate because **he himself** is a part of the Body.

So, seeking an excuse for pride, a new imaginary opponent, a prideful, boastful, **Gentile** Christian will say, "**Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.**" But **Paul** argues: **True, but so what?** Still, that doesn't mean that **you, a wild branch**, can boast

that **you're** better than **the natural branches**. **The Jews were broken off because of their lack of trust. You keep your place only because of your trust in the God of the Jews and the Jewish Messiah. So, don't be arrogant; on the contrary, be terrified of letting pride in having been included with God's people, replace trust in Him!** This was the very **sin** that **Paul** found in unbelieving **Jews** (see [Av](#) - **The Religious Jew's Lack of the Spirit**). This imaginary opponent needed to **be terrified** once he realized that **if God did not spare the natural branches when they fell off through lack of trust in Him, He certainly won't spare him, a grafted-in-branch**, when he, through antisemitic pride, demonstrate the same **lack of trust (11:19-21)!³⁰¹**

Some people think that if they have merely given mental assent to the proposition that **Yeshua is the Messiah**, they have "fire insurance" and are going to heaven no matter how they live their lives. The writer to the **Hebrews** also warned these intellectually convinced unbelievers who have yet to step over the line from knowledge to **faith** (see the commentary on **Hebrews** [Al](#) - **How Shall We Escape If We Ignore So Great a Salvation**). **So, take a good look at God's kindness and his severity: on the one hand, severity toward those natural branches who fell off; but, on the other hand, God's kindness toward you grafted-in-branches, provided you maintain yourself in that kindness! Otherwise, you too will be cut off (11:22)!** The truth of the matter is **faith without actions to match is dead (James 2:14-16)**.

An argument for restoration: The only thing that is preventing **Isra'el's** national restoration is unbelief. And if any **Jew** exercises **belief** he can be **grafted** back into this place of blessing. **Moreover, the others, if they do not persist in their lack of trust, then they will most certainly be grafted in; because God is able to graft them back in.** This means that **God is the Promise Keeper**, which is essentially the message in **Chapters 9 through 11**. Then **Paul** gives us the reason why we should expect the nation of **Isra'el** to be restored. **The olive tree is Isra'el**, and the **Jewish** covenants belong to **the Jews**. Therefore, **if you Gentiles were cut out of what is by nature a wild olive tree**, a nation of pagans separated from **God's** promises, **and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree (Isra'el)**, **how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree (11:23-24)!**

How much easier it would be to bring an understanding of spiritual truth to those who belong to **the people God** has been dealing with for thousands of years than to those who do not! The analogy does not apply to every **Jew** over every **Gentile** - especially today, when some **Jews** are raised without any **Jewish** identification, while many **Gentiles**, particularly those raised in Christian homes, have been exposed to spiritual truth as much,

or as more, than many **Jews**. But, leaving the modern exceptions aside, it ought to be easier for a **Jew** to believe in **Yeshua** as **the Messiah** than for a **Gentile** (and this certainly would have been so when **Paul** wrote **Romans**), since “**Messiah**” is a concept which is a part of **Jewish** culture, whereas a **Gentile** has to be introduced to an idea alien to **his** culture (see the commentary on **Acts Bj - The Church in Syrian Antioch**). Furthermore, a **Jew**, as a member of **the Jewish people**, has many advantages that **Gentiles** don't have (see **Cp - The Grief of Isra'el's Past Paradox: Eight advantages that the Jews have**). This is why a “**Jews for Jesus**” broadside says, in a lighthearted vein, “You don't have to be **Jewish** to believe in **Jesus** - but it helps!”³⁰²