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The Mystery of the Olive Tree

As Harry Ironside (the Canadian-American Bible teacher, preacher, theologian, and author, who pastored the Moody Church in Chicago from 1929 to 1948) recounts in his book *The Great Parenthesis*, there is a great Dispensational division in **Romans Chapters 9, 10, and 11**. We can speak of these chapters as parentheses because one could move on without being conscious that anything was missing between the closing verses of **Chapter 8** and opening verses of **Chapter 12**. In **the first eight chapters** of **Romans** Paul reveals **ADONAI's** method of dealing with **sin** and providing a perfect righteousness for those who have none. Then in **Chapters 12 to 16** of **Romans** we see the practical effects of those who have been made righteous by faith in **Messiah**. But between **Chapters 8 and 12** we have a great parenthesis in which **the apostle** pauses, as guided by **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**, to show how the Gospel in the B'rit Chadashah harmonizes with the TaNaKh and **His** electing grace in the making of **Isra'el His covenant people** (see the commentary on **Romans, to see link click [Cn](#) - The Centrality of Isra'el in the plan of ADONAI**).

In **Romans 3:23** we learn that there is no difference, that **all have sinned and come short of the glory of God**. **The Jew** is shown no more grace in **Messiah** than **the Gentile**. All must come to **ADONAI** in exactly the same way, as needy **sinner**s trusting in **Yeshua** for salvation. This would naturally raise the question in the mind of any honest **Jew**: But what then of the special promises made to **Isra'el**? What of the covenant entered into at Mount Sinai? How does this affect the promise made to **Abraham** and **his** descendants? These questions and others are fully answered in **Romans Chapters 9, 10, and 11**. In **Chapter 9**, **the Spirit of God** speaks specifically of **the LORD's past** dealings with **Isra'el** (see **Romans [Co](#) - The Past Paradox of Isra'el**); in **Chapter 10**, of **His present** dealings with **them** (see **Romans [Cs](#) - The Present Paradox of Isra'el**); and in **Chapter 11**, of **His future** dealings with **His chosen people** (see **Romans [Cw](#) - The Future Paradox of Isra'el**).

Turning, then, to **Chapter 9**, we see **Isra'el's past** as an elected **nation**. It pleased **ADONAI** to separate these **people** from all other peoples to **Himself** in

order that **they** might be a special testimony in the earth. This privilege was not given to **them** because of any merit of **their** own. Indeed, it was in **His** sovereign grace that **Ha'Shem** chose **Isaac** but not **Ishmael**, and chose **Jacob** but not **Esau**. **YHVH** was not unrighteous in doing this. **He** was **the Creator**. Like **the potter**, **He** had power over **the clay** to make it whatever **He** wanted to (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Cw - At the Potter's House](#)). **God** chose **Isra'el** as the means of fulfilling **His** promises, so that **they** might be a blessing to the whole world.

Now if **ADONAI** chose to bless **the seed of Abraham** after the flesh, and **they** completely failed as a nation to appreciate **His** goodness, and when **His** own **Son** came into the world **they** fulfilled **their** own Scriptures in condemning **Him**, who shall question the righteousness of **God** in temporarily setting **them** aside, taking up **the Gentiles** and giving **them** the glorious privilege that **they** now enjoy?

So, in **Chapter 10** we have **the LORD's present** dealings with **Isra'el**. Yes, **He** has temporarily set **Isra'el** aside during this long parenthetical period, but that does not mean that individual **Jews** cannot be saved. Any **Jew** can come to **Yeshua Messiah** and find salvation on exactly the same basis as any **Gentile**. So we read in **Romans 10:12**, "**There is no difference between Jew and Gentile - ADONAI is the same for everyone, rich toward everyone who calls on him.**" And **the apostle** adds in **Romans 10:13**, "**since everyone who calls on the name of ADONAI will be saved.**" During this entire period (see the commentary on [Hebrews Bp - The Dispensation of Grace](#)), while **Isra'el** nationally has been temporarily set aside, **God's whosoever may come** message in **John 3:16** is going out to the world, and any **Jew** or **Gentile** may take advantage of it, and if **they** refuse, **they** are responsible for **their** own judgment.

But, in **Chapter 11** we can see the **future** of **ADONAI's covenant people**. We are first told that **their eyes** were blinded because **they** were so preoccupied with **their** own works that **they** rebelled against the grace of **God**. Therefore, national **Isra'el** is judicially **blinded** until today: **What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain.**

The elect among them did, but the others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day (Deut 29:4; Isaiah 29:10)." And David says: **"May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever (Ps 69:22-23)." Again I ask: Did they stumble**

so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring (Romans 11:7-12)!³⁹²

In **His** sovereignty, **ADONAI** has used the rebellion of **the Jews** to open the door of grace to all **Gentiles** everywhere. You might say that **the Gentiles** are indebted to the unbelieving **Jews**. So it is unthinkable for any **Gentile** to speak unkindly of any **Jew** because of **their** failure to understand **God's** plan, despite understanding that there will always be a believing remnant of Jewish believers (see **Romans Cx - The Testimony of the Jewish Believers**) and that nationally **all Isra'el will be saved (Romans 11:25-26a)**, untold millions of **Jews** have missed **their** glorious opportunity, even as our **Lord Himself** said: **But if you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes (Luke 19:42). Look, your house is left to you desolate.** This prophecy of doom was soon fulfilled by **her** complete destruction (see **The Life of Christ Mt - The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on Tisha B'Av in 70 AD**). Then **the Supreme Commander of Life and Death** quoted from **Psalm 118:26: I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Luke 13:35).** The multitudes did quote this verse when **He** entered **the Holy City** in **His** Triumphal Entry, but their religious leaders disapproved. **He** would not come again until a believing remnant had been prepared who would beg **Him** to come back (see **Revelation Ev - The Basis for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**). In **the far eschatological future** this truth will be proclaimed when **Jesus comes again** and enters **Tziyon** as the millennial **Ruler**.³⁹³



And so with the temporary setting aside of **Isra'el** nationally, we have the Gospel of grace going out to **the Gentile nations**. Speaking from the standpoint of **the Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 13:37)**, Paul continues: **For if their casting Yeshua aside means reconciliation for the world, what will their accepting him mean? It will be life from the dead! Now if the hallah offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf. And if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you - a wild olive - were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree, then don't boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you. So you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." True, but so what? They were broken off because of their lack of trust. However, you keep your place only because of your trust. So don't be arrogant; on the contrary, be terrified! For if God did not spare the natural branches, he certainly won't spare you! So take a good look at God's kindness and his sternness: on the one hand, severity toward those who fell off; but, on the other hand, God's kindness toward you - provided you maintain yourself in that kindness! Otherwise, you too will be cut off! Moreover, the others, if they do not persist in their lack of trust, will be grafted in; because God is able to graft them back in (Romans 11:15-22).** The figure of **the olive tree** used here is taken from **Jeremiah, ADONAI called you an olive tree, beautiful, full of leaves and good fruit. With the roar of a mighty storm the LORD set it**

on fire, and its branches are broken (Jeremiah 11:16).

There are three plants used in a special way as representing **Isra'el**. **The vine** speaks of **them** as **God's** testimony on the earth; **the fig tree** is the symbol of **Isra'el** nationally, and **the olive tree** tells of **them** as a **covenant people** in special relation to **YHVH**. Because of their unfaithfulness, and particularly **their** rejection of **Yeshua** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ek - It is only by Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons, that This Fellow Drives Out Demons**), that **the** natural **branches** were broken off from the **olive tree** of which **Abraham** is the root. **He** is **the father** of all that believe/trust/or have faith in (Greek: *pistis*) the **Messiah**. Thus, as a result of **Isra'el's** national unbelief, those **branches** were torn off of **the olive tree**. In **their** place, **wild branches**, representing **the Gentiles, were grafted in (Romans 11:17)**. It is important to understand that these **grafted in Gentile branches** do not represent individuals, but **nations**. Any individual **Gentile** who does not trust in **Yeshua** as **Messiah** will face the same judgment as any unbelieving Jew (see the commentary on **Revelation Fo - The Great White Throne Judgment**).

Unbelieving critics of the Bible have used **Paul's** figure of **the olive tree** to say that it is not inspired by **God**. "How," they ask, "could **God** make such a mistake as that which Paul has made here? He speaks of **grafting wild branches into a good tree**. Every horticulturalist knows that you do not **graft wild branches into a good tree**; you **graft good branches into a wild tree** in order to completely change the character of its fruit." But here, as elsewhere, the critics are wrong. They do not read carefully enough, nor, shall I say, far enough.³⁹⁴

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 **Romans 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 (Romans 11:23-24)! ADONAI's** setting **Isra'el** aside is not only partial and passing but also purposeful. **YHVH** temporarily set aside **His**

chosen people in order to bring salvation to **the Gentiles**, to make **Isra'el jealous of them (Romans 11:11b-c)** so **they** would yearn to receive **the blessings of the Messiah they** had rejected, and thereby be used to bring **blessing** to the rest of the world (**Romans 11:12-15**). But **God's** ultimate, overriding purpose is to glorify **Himself**.³⁹⁵

In **Romans 11:25** the word **“for”** points forward to the reason, given immediately, why **Paul** has presented **the olive tree** illustration (see the commentary on **Romans Cz - The Illustration of Isra'el's Future**). **Paul** uses the word **brothers** to emphasize that **he** considers not only Messianic **Jews**, but also **Gentile** believers to be **his brothers** in the faith, because **he** didn't want any of **them** to be offended at what **he** was about to say next.

For brothers, I don't want you to be ignorant of this mystery (Greek: *musterion*), **which God formerly concealed but has now revealed (Rom 11:25a)**. At the end of **Paul's** letter, **he** defines **mystery** as being a revelation **which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is made known, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God (Rom 16:25-26; Eph 3:5-7)**. In this, both the Messianic **Jews** and the **Gentile** believers must grasp the fullness of **their** individual callings by **ADONAI**.

Why was this **secret** truth **kept** hidden for so **long** until **Paul** revealed it? Because one would have expected **Isra'el** to be the first nation to **be saved**. **Isra'el** had all the advantages enjoyed by no other people (see **Romans Cp - The Grief of Isra'el's Past Paradox: Eight advantages that the Jews have**). **The Gospel itself is to the Jew especially (Romans 1:16)**, and **YHVH** has promised **Jewish** national salvation (**Ezeki'el 36:24-36; Matthew 23:37; Acts 1:6-7**). Why then, is **God** doing the unexpected, making **the Gentiles joint-heirs (Ephesians 3:3-9)** with **the Jews**? In order to give the fullest possible demonstration of **His love** for all humanity and not merely to **the Jews**.

But before **Paul** identifies and explains the particular **mystery** of which **he** is speaking here, **he** once again cautions **the Gentiles** against **their** pride, warning **them** to avoid twisting the truths of **the mystery** as being wise in **their** own eyes: **So that you won't imagine you know more than you actually do (11:25b)**. **Proverbs 3:7** reminds us: **Don't be conceited about your own wisdom; but fear ADONAI, and turn from evil.**³⁹⁶

What a day it will be when **God's** program is completed and **He** takes **Isra'el** up again and brings **them** at last to confess **their sin** (see the commentary on **Revelation Ev - The Basis of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**), to look up in faith to **the Savior** whom **their** fathers had rejected, and confess **Him** as **their Redeemer** and **their** long-awaited for **Messiah**. Then **Isra'el** shall blossom and bud and fill the face of the earth with fruit, for **they** will become **ADONAI's** instruments for the enlightenment of the **Gentile** world.³⁹⁷

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for **Your** steadfast ever enduring love for **Isra'el** and **Your** deep and passionate desire to use whatever you have to use, so that **Your chosen people** will come to believe in **You** as **their Messiah**. How awesome it is that **You** desire to bless the **Jews** and **Gentiles** with **Your** love, but recognizing **Yeshua** as **their Messiah**. When **Isra'el** finally **looks toward Messiah** whom **they pierced (Zechariah 12:10, 13:1-9)**; then **Yeshua** will return from heaven to rescue **Isra'el**. Thank **You** for grafting **the Gentiles** into **the olive tree**. **ADONAI's** love is so great! **He** eagerly waits to rescue both **Jew** and **Gentile** by faith in **His** death and resurrection, to hearts filled with love for **God**. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*