

## Paul's Parable Of The Olive Tree

Paul has discussed the fall of Israel and the acceptance of the Gentiles and shown that this came about through Israel's rejection of the gospel and the Gentiles acceptance of it. He has shown the gospel was more quickly proclaimed to Gentiles after Jews rejected it, but also shown that just as the preaching of the gospel brought riches to the Gentiles so should the reception of Jews be *"life from the dead"* (Rom. 11:14f). He then gives a "parable" to show that it would altogether right for Jews who had once refused the gospel but had changed their minds, to be received again by God just as God had received the Gentiles. He said, *"and if the first fruit is holy, so is the lump and if the root is holy, so are the branches"* (11:16).

Paul wrote to guard Gentiles against overconfidence and a hurtful pride. *"But if some of the branches were broken off and thou, being a wild olive, was grafted in among them and didst become partakers with them of the root of the fatness of the olive tree, glory not over the branches, but if thou gloriest, it is not thou that bearest the root, but the root thee"* (11:17f). The wild olive branch obviously has reference to Gentiles. The branches which were broken off were Jews, and the branches which remained were Jews obedient to the gospel of Christ. The "root" into which wild olive branches were grafted and of which the natural branches remained were the promises God had made to Abraham. The natural branches were part of the *"root and fatness of the tree"* because they were part of the fleshly promise God made Abraham. The branches grafted in stood because the root sustained them: God's promise to bless all nations through Abraham's seed; the branches grafted in depended upon that promise -- they did not sustain the root; the root sustained them. Shameful, sinful pride might lead some to say, *"Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in"* but that was not true (11:19). Jews were not broken off to make room for the Gentiles: the breaking off of the Jew and the grafting in of the Gentile were two, totally unrelated items. Paul proceeded to show that any whose pride lifted him to think he was so special that God had broken off natural branches to make room for him, had reached a very dangerous, false conclusion. *"Well, by their unbelief they were broken off and thou standest by thy faith. Be not highminded, but fear: for if God spare not the natural branches, neither will he spare thee"* (Rom. 11:20-21).

Why had these branches who were broken off, cast aside? One thing was certain. It was not to make room for the branches from the wild olive tree! The branches which were broken off were broken off because of their unbelief. Paul has labored extensively in this section to show that the rejection of Israel was not really God's choice nor decree: it was Israel's choice. When

she rejected God's offered mercy, through His Son, they left him no choice but to cast them off. On the other hand, Gentiles had been "*grafted in*" upon their faith. They had sought and obtained the righteousness which is by faith and in their faith they had become seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:7; 26f).

God's warning is clear. Remove the "*who*" was cut off and the "*who*" was grafted in and read it this way "*Broken off because of unbelief;*" "*grafted in because of faith.*" If the natural branches who were loved because of their fathers' sake were broken off because of their unbelief; God (who is no respecter of persons) would not spare those who are grafted in but who allowed an evil heart of unbelief to enter into their soul. Such will fall. The thought should cause us to fear and to do a real self examination. Are we in the faith? Do we still have a heart in fullness of faith? It is something to think about! NEXT: "The Goodness And Severity Of God."

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