

Series: God & Abraham #1103

Title: An Introduction: The Hebrew Roots of Being Christian (Part 1)

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. I hope that you were with us so far this week for the beginning of our introduction to the lives of God and Abraham, in relation to one another. Should you have been away from your radio or if you missed the podcast and need to get caught up, just get on-line and visit www.godisministry.org (that's godisministry.o-r-g) and there you will find God Is Podcast number 1,101 and 1,102. The titles being *The Hebrews Are a Pilgrimage People* and *Abram, My Professor, and Me*. Listen on-line or download them and hear what was said. It will be well worth your time, one day's teaching building on the one before it.

As we finished last time I said that, over the course of several days, as we make our way to the verses in Genesis that introduce us to Abraham in the land of Mesopotamia, I want to first talk about the Hebrew roots of being Christian. I want to show you, from the Scripture, how every Christian person finds their spiritual origin in Abraham. Let us start here today.

We will follow the writings of the second most prominent Jew in the New Testament and he is Paul. Jesus being the most prominent – the Christ above all others – but (in my opinion), the Apostle Paul being second. Can you make a case for the Apostle Peter? Sure you can! But Paul is of great interest to Abraham because Paul loved Abraham and spoke of him often.

And of course Paul was Jewish. In fact, he was proud of being a Jew. Listen to him writing to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 22. **“²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.**” That was 2 Corinthians 11, verse 22. You heard him mention Abraham, saying he is a descendent of Abraham. He is a Hebrew. He is an Israelite. And it is over in the Book of Philippians at chapter 3 where Paul establishes and affirms his Jewishness.

Let me read from Philippians 3 at verses 5 and 6. Paul says of himself, **“⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.”** You can read that again for yourself in Philippians 3.5 and 6. If ever there was a true and genuine Jewish man, he is this man: Paul. Shockingly, sometimes Gentile Bible readers think of Paul as being a Gentile. But that's flat wrong. He writes, “[I am a] Hebrew of Hebrews.”

Being a Hebrew of Hebrews, who better to write about Abraham than Paul? Paul knew the Hebrew people better than the back of his hand, so to the Apostle we turn to help us understand how our roots as Christians are Hebraic. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians in Ephesians 3, verse 6, **“the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body...”** (Ephesians 3.6.) That is, we Gentile believers are joined to our Jewish brothers and sisters as fellow heirs and fellow members of this one body of God's people.

I think Paul is uniquely qualified to demonstrate to us the Hebrew roots of being Christian, and he does so in a very compelling way not in Corinthians or Philippians or Ephesians, but in...Romans! So, turn (or scroll) in your Bible to the New Testament Book of Romans and get situated in chapter 11. (Romans chapter 11.) This is such a great chapter, which is really the climax of chapters 1-11, even of chapters 9-11. But, as usual, we have to keep to a certain pace and so we will not have time to explore this with as much depth as we would like. I merely want to highlight certain verses.

And to understand these we have to know something about an olive tree. Now why an olive tree (of all things)? That is because Paul uses the olive tree as an analogy to talk about our Hebraic roots. Do you like olives (I do not)? Do you like, do you use olive oil? (I do.) We use it a lot for cooking, well, to be honest my wife uses it a lot for cooking and I am the beneficiary of her culinary talent!

Anyway, olives and olive oil come from olive trees and they are in abundance both in Israel (more on that in a moment) and in Italy (the capital of which is Rome and the Romans are the Christians living in Rome to whom Paul writes about an olive tree so they got the analogy). Today, Spain grows the most olives, but Italy is second.

An olive tree is not the most beautiful tree in the world (in my opinion, but many people do find beauty in it). It has a gnarled trunk and grey-green leaves and an olive tree is known for its longevity. One tree can live hundreds of years, outlasting all the other fruit trees. For example, if you have opportunity to visit Israel and if you go to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives you will see many olive trees most of which are hundreds of years old. By the way, Gethsemane literally means "olive press." Gethsemane means olive press.

According to Marvin Wilson, in his book *Our Father Abraham*, the roots on these trees are strong and sturdy. The trees thrive in rocky soil in a hot, dry climate. And very old ones have tender, young shoots that spring up around the roots. Hence the analogy of Psalm 128, verse 3, "**Your children like olive plants around your table.**" Children are analogous to the young shoot on an olive tree. (Psalm 128, verse 3.)

Also, in the Psalms, at Psalm 52 and verse 8 David says that, trusting in the lovingkindness of God, he is like "**a green olive tree in the house of God.**" This speaks to the fruitfulness and productivity of the one who trusts in God. And then I want to read you some other texts just to give you a sense for the way the olive tree is used so abundantly in all of Scripture. I will repeat these references near the end, so that you can reflect on these personally. If you have a way to take notes, mark these:

In Deuteronomy 8, verse 8 Moses describes the land of Canaan this way, "**a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey...**" The olive oil flowed in Canaan. In Jeremiah chapter 11 and verse 16 Jeremiah says this about Israel, "**The Lord called your name, 'A green olive tree, beautiful in fruit and form...'**" And then Hosea says (also of Israel), "**His shoots will sprout, and his beauty will be like the olive tree...**"

Thus far I have read from Psalm 128.3, Psalm 52.8, Deuteronomy 8.8, Jeremiah 11.16, and Hosea 14.6. And in 1 Kings chapter 6 we read about the building of Solomon's Temple where olive wood was used for construction. This is 1 Kings 6, verse 23, "**23 Also in the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim of olive wood...**" And in verses 31-33 we read, "**31 For the entrance of the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood, the lintel and five-sided doorposts. 32 So he made two doors of olive wood, and he carved on them carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold; and he spread the gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees. 33 So also he made for the entrance of the nave four-sided doorposts of olive wood...**" That was 1 Kings 6, verses 23 and 31-33. (1 Kings 6.)

The Bible speaks of olives being eaten, and olive oil used in cooking, to light lamps and in the ceremonial anointing and healing of those who are sick. And all these insights into the olive tree are valuable as foundational to what we discover in the writing of Paul in Romans chapter 11. In that chapter he uses the olive tree as the way to describe the truth that every Christian has roots in the covenant that God made with the Hebrew man Abraham.

As we move towards the close, let me read Romans 11, verses 1 and 2 and make a quick comment on these verses. We will pick-up here again tomorrow. Romans 11, verses 1 and 2a reads, "**I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew...**"

From these words, highlight two truths. First, God has not rejected His people. Paul says, "May it never be (exclamation point)!" And in verse 2, "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew..." Who are God's people? They are the Jews. The Hebrews. Israelites. Beginning with the Patriarchs Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and right through to Paul and beyond him right to the end of time – God has *not* rejected them.

Second truth: Paul the Apostle is one of them. He is a Jew, a Hebrew, and an Israelite. Paul writes it as plain as the clear blue sky: "For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." He associates himself not with the Gentiles, but with these Jews. More about this tomorrow on God Is.

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