

Series: God & Abraham #1104

Title: An Introduction: The Hebrew Roots of Being Christian (Part 2)

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. As part of an introduction to the lives of God and Abraham we are looking at the Hebrew roots of being Christian and we are going to be in the Book of Romans chapter 11 again today. You can turn there if you have your Bible close by. Romans 11, and I will begin the reading at verses 1 and just the first part of verse 2.

“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, last time, we have highlighted 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: “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. Again we must affirm that Paul writes to the Romans and to us as a Jew and in this chapter he is going to be very firm with those of us who are Gentile Christians. Using the figure of the olive tree and its branches, he teaches us that our roots are Hebrew. It will do all of us well to heed what he writes here and apply this to our lives. And especially to remember this when we catch up with Abraham in his walk with the Lord God.

Not only is Paul a descendant of Abraham, but anyone who claims Christ as Lord is also a descendant of Abraham and we will get to that life-changing truth soon enough.

Paul is a Jew writing to Gentiles as he says in Romans 11, verse 13, **“I am speaking to you who are Gentiles.”** And in verse 11 he affirms, **“salvation has come to the Gentiles.”** That is not in question. These Christians have indeed been saved from sin by the Lord Jesus Christ. What is under consideration is the way in which God has chosen to save us. What is the beginning of our salvation?

And the answer to that is found in what is the root. Imagine in your mind’s eye a great big, healthy olive tree. Yesterday I described what they look like. This olive tree has a very strong root. And we should ask, in Paul’s use of the olive tree, *who* is the root? The root is Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (the Hebrew Patriarchs). At the root of this olive tree is Abraham. God starts with this one man Abraham. Let me recall to your attention the Living God speaking to Abraham in Genesis 12, verses 1-3. I read this for us on Tuesday but here is this promise from God again.

Genesis 12.1-3, “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

There is the root of salvation. God starts with this one man Abraham. And then growing out of the root emerge all of the branches on this olive tree. And these branches represent the Hebrews. Paul calls these **“natural branches”** in verse 21. This makes sense. It is *natural* that from the Hebrews come the Jewish people. The branches are the Patriarch’s descendants: the nation of Israel. The root supports the branches. Without a strong root the branches cannot grow. But with the strong root, the branches spring forth from the root of the tree.

This promise made to the one man Abraham finds its fulfilment in his descendants.

I hope you are with me so far.

Hold that in your mind and when we read along further in Romans 11 we learn that Paul speaks of a second olive tree. He calls this one wild. And he says from the wild olive tree grow wild branches. And these wild branches from the wild olive tree represent Gentiles. We, and I say "we" because I am a Gentile. We do not naturally grow out of the first olive tree, what Paul calls the "cultivated" olive tree. And this also makes sense, because we are not Jews but Gentiles. The branches of the cultivated olive tree are Jews and the branches of the second olive tree, the wild one, are Gentiles.

Until, until something miraculous happens: through Christ, God grafts into the cultivated olive tree the wild branches from the wild olive tree. That is, through the promise of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the ministry of Christ on the Cross, we who believe in Jesus get to be grafted into the olive tree whose root is Abraham. Listen to this verse of such great news to Gentile Christians, Romans 11, verse 17. I am reading Romans 11.17, "**...you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree...**"

The branches from the wild olive tree, the Gentiles, have been grafted into the cultivated olive tree, the Jews, together forming the people of God. And once the Gentiles are grafted in then we become recipients of God's covenant blessing to Abraham (which we read in Genesis 12). We Gentiles, who believe by faith in God, become Abraham's spiritual descendants. Paul says this best over in Galatians chapter 3 and verse 29. I am reading Galatians 3.29, "**If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.**"

Wow! Did you get that? "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." (Galatians 3, verse 29.)

Sticking with this same theme, making his case that believing Gentiles are grafted into the cultivated olive tree which has Abraham as the root, in verse 24 of Romans 11 Paul writes again. This is a key part of verse 24, "**24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree...**" There it is again. You (the Gentiles) were cut off of what is by nature a wild olive tree and *then* God grafted us into the cultivated olive tree, whose root is Abraham. Verses 17 and 24 of this same chapter should be read alongside one another.

This is truth we must both understand and accept. Because of what gracious God has done, both believing Jews and Gentiles share in the nourishment that comes from the "**rich root of the olive tree,**" as Paul says in verse 17. Gentiles are Abraham's heirs according to promise, just as the Hebrew people are. This is why I said that the fulfilment of the Genesis 12 promise is the reason I am a Christian/the reason you are a Christian (if you are). We are dependent on the Jews for our salvation. Without what God did in the life of Abraham, we would not be grafted in, because we would have no cultivated olive tree to be grafted into. We would still just be wild olives.

This what Paul says to the Ephesians in Ephesians chapter 2, verses 12 and 13, "**12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**" (Ephesians 2.12 and 13.)

Gentile Christians within the sound of my voice: remember, says Paul! We wild olive branches were once excluded, but now we are included in the covenants of promise. We once had no hope and we were without God in this world, but because of Christ Jesus we who were far off – just wild olives rolling around on the ground waiting to be stomped on and crushed, we have been collected and brought near, grafted right into God's olive tree by the blood of our Savior Jesus Christ, the Jew.

Tomorrow I want to lead off talking about what the root of the olive tree provides to us who have now been grafted in. And then we will talk directly about the warning the Apostle gives to us Gentile Christians, a stern warning we must heed but many Gentile believers do not! We will do this tomorrow on God Is.

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