

Series: God & Abraham #1105

Title: An Introduction: The Hebrew Roots of Being Christian (Part 3)

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. We meet again, by the will and grace of God, as we continue discussing the Hebrew roots of being Christian. This is a perspective that I believe is essential as we prepare our minds and hearts to meet the Hebrew Patriarch Abraham. The origin of the salvation from sin we Christians now enjoy is found in the promise that God made to this one man Abraham. God chose him and then from him came all of the people who are now the spiritual descendants of him. So, a special invitation to my fellow Gentile Christian friends: we must value and honor the Hebrew roots of our Christian faith.

And it is my responsibility to show you this from within the Bible. And so do not take what I just said as an encouragement only from yours truly. Today we will listen to someone with far more authority than I have, and he is the Apostle Paul and his writing, inspired by *God*, found in the Bible in the Book of Romans. Let's again pick-up God's Word at Romans 11. Last time we covered several verses, not in sequential order, but moving around learning about Paul's analogy of the cultivated olive tree with its roots and branches. That olive tree represents Israel. It's root is Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And its branches are the Hebrew people.

And then there was the other olive tree described for us in Romans chapter 11. That is a wild olive tree and it represents Gentiles (the non-Jews). Now the root of salvation from sin is not in the wild olive tree. The root of God's saving grace is in the cultivated olive tree, but as a wild olive Gentiles are hopeless because we are not Jews. Because, as Jesus famously said, "**Salvation is from the Jews,**" meaning that God first revealed His salvation to them and not to Gentiles. Therefore as a Gentile I was excluded from salvation as were you if you are not Jewish.

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 Gentiles who believe by faith 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 now believing Gentiles, have been grafted into the cultivated olive tree, the believing 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. 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 again today, "**If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.**"

This is how gracious God is to us, my Gentile friends. We who were worthless, just a bunch of dead branches have now been collected by Jesus and we have been grafted into the cultivated olive tree whose roots are Hebrew; whose roots grow down into the soil of the Hebrew Patriarchs whom God has chosen to reveal Himself and His way of salvation: *by faith*. As Paul writes in Romans 11, verse 20, we "**stand by faith.**" (We stand by faith.)

That is how Abraham stood – by faith in God. And that is how we stand – by faith in God. Gentile Christians have been grafted into the cultivated olive tree. And for this we must be *very, very* grateful. Paul will stress that in a few minutes, but first let me fulfil my promise to you yesterday and tell you what the root of the cultivated olive tree provides to us who have now been grafted in. Paul calls this a "**rich root**" in verse 17, so we know this is going to be for our benefit. And for this, listen to Paul still in the Book of Romans chapter 11 at verse 18. He writes to the Gentiles, "**do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.**"

This verse is essential to the two points I want to make, and the part of it that interests us first is this: “it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you.”

Please remember that the root of this olive tree is Abraham, the man whom God chose to reveal salvation, and Abraham the man who believed God by faith. Remember as well the promise God made to him in Genesis 12, verse 3: “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” In Romans 11.18, the branch being referred to in this part of the verse as “you” are Gentile believers who have been grafted into the olive tree. We are part of the fulfilment of that promise God made to Abraham. And we are told that the root supports us, not the other way around. And of course anyone who knows anything about trees knows the root supports, nourishes, and lifts up the branches. The branches do not support, nourish, or lift up the tree.

The Greek word here for “supports” in verse 18 is the word *bastazo* and it means to take up, to carry, to bear, and to support. So the root, who is Abraham, the covenant promises of God made to him, those promises fulfilled in Christian people, that root supports us, takes us up and carries us, and bears us up. The analogy and imagery is powerful. And this is what the root of the olive tree provides to us who have been grafted into it. This root is what supports us. That’s why I want to emphasize the Hebrew roots of being Christian.

My second point that I want to highlight is that because of this, because we Gentile Christians are supported by this Hebrew root, it means that we must not be arrogant towards the Hebrews, towards the Jews. There is no room for us to be arrogant and prideful towards our Jewish friends. And the reason Paul emphasizes that we must not be arrogant is because we are not self-sufficient. In the words of Marv Wilson, “[we] are dependent upon the Jews for [our] salvation and spiritual existence (*Our Father Abraham*, 15).”

And as Dan Johnson writes (quote), “From Paul’s time until the present, the church has tended to view its existence independently of Israel...In Paul’s view any church which exists independently of Israel ceases to be the church as part of God’s salvation plan... (*Our Father Abraham*, 15).” Unquote.

Gentile Christian friends, to our shame, I am sorry to say that we have too often acted in a superior way towards our Jewish Christian friends. When a Jew converts to Christ, how do we treat this brother or sister? Arrogantly? Paul commands that we do not act in that way, but rather that we show humility. Many of us need correction on this. We need to return to our roots and find that we are rooted in the Hebrew Abraham and God’s promises made to him. And, what is our attitude to Jewish people who have not converted to Christ? Will we win these friends over as we acknowledge how thankful and appreciative we are that through their forefather Abraham, God also chose us?

At the start of verse 18 when Paul writes, “**do not be arrogant toward the branches**” by these branches the Apostle means *unbelieving Israel, unbelieving Jews*. By way of application, we Christians are not to show arrogance towards Jewish people today, people deeply loved by God, men and women who have yet to accept Jesus as The Messiah and to invest their faith in Him as their Savior. And I am concerned that the unbelieving Jew does not have a very good impression of the Christian church at present. As Marv Wilson also points out, ironically olive branches symbolize peace, but sadly the historic relationship between Jews and Gentiles has not been one of peace! Christians should be working, in practical ways, to rectify this. Lord willing, as we proceed, I will say more about this.

Well, we need to leave off here. Join us again next time. I will remind you about our Hebrew roots, and then we will talk about why the Hebrew Bible is so important to us, beginning on Monday on God Is.

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