

# Romans 11:16-24 - Two Olive Trees

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## 11:16 - The Branches are Holy [\[listen\]](#)

- **"if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy"**  
Paul makes an analogy based on the Old Testament practice of setting aside the first of one's increase to God ([Ex. 22:29](#); [23:19](#); [Nu. 15:20](#)). By setting aside the firstfruits to God, the entire portion was considered dedicated or *set apart*. By honoring God with the very first increase, God would respond and bless subsequent production and the entire crop was set apart for God's increase. Holiness includes the idea of *separation* or *setting aside*.
- **"if the root is holy so are the branches"**  
The "root" upholds and sustains the branches. The root of the cultivated olive tree is considered to be holy and *therefore* so are the branches.

## 11:17 - Broken Branches [\[listen\]](#)

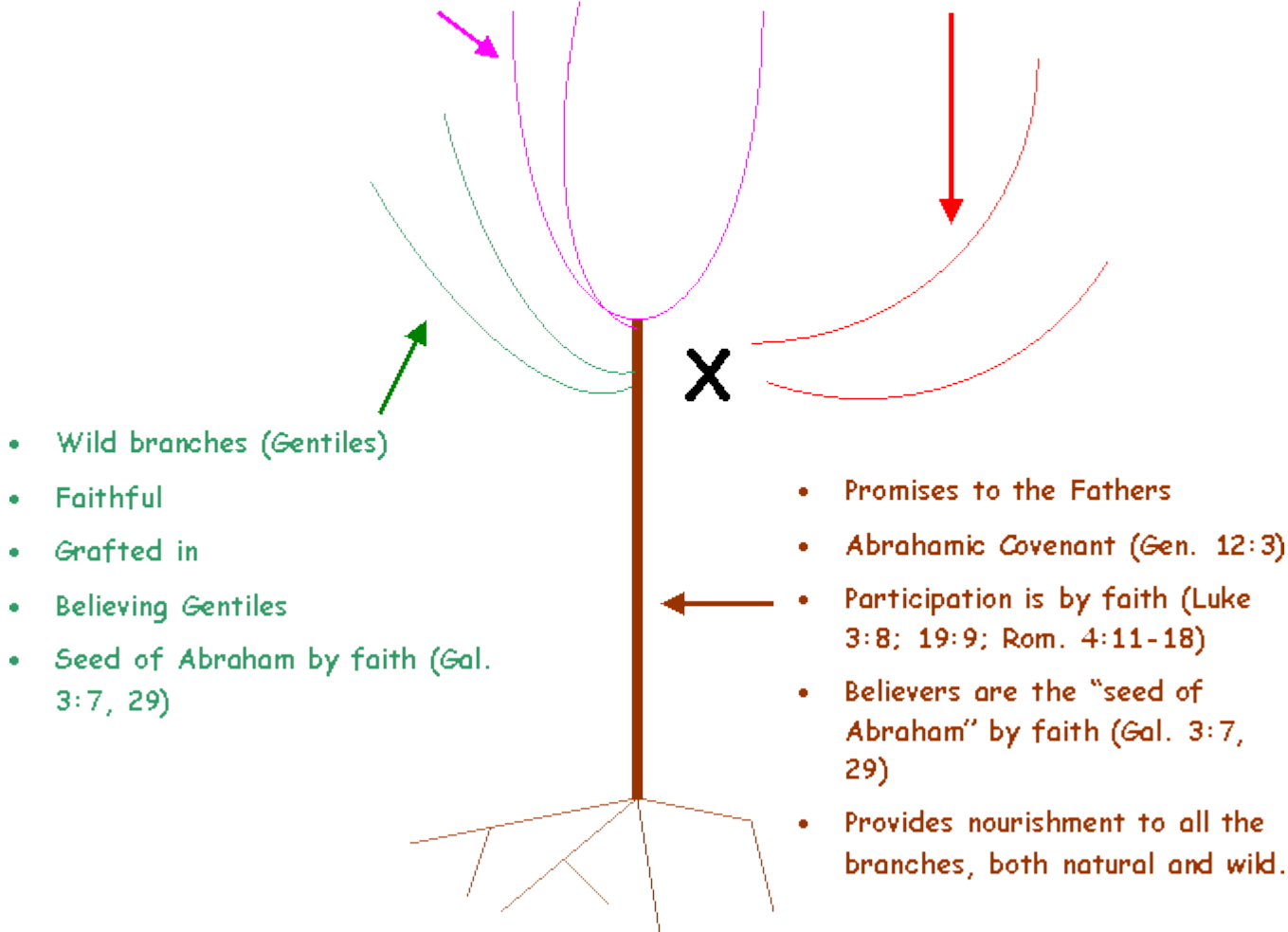
- **"some of the branches were broken off"**  
Paul declares **all** the branches to be "holy" *prior to* some of the branches being broken off.
- **Three Entities**  
The natural branches are the Jews--the nation of Israel.
  - 1) **Natural Branches** - *Some* of the natural branches are broken off. These are the unbelieving Jews who rejected Jesus. These are the "not all Israel who are of Israel" ([Rom. 9:6](#)) who Jesus mentions as being members of the "synagogue of Satan" ([Rev. 2:9](#); [3:9](#)). The remaining natural branches are believing Jews which Paul refers to elsewhere as "the Israel of God" ([Gal. 6:16](#)).
  - 2) **Wild Branches** - The wild branches are Gentiles, some of which came to faith and became grafted into the cultivated olive tree.
  - 3) **Root and Fatness** - The root and fatness is the base of the cultivated olive tree which supports all the branches in the tree, both grafted and natural. This represents the promises and covenants given through the fathers (see diagram below).

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• **Grafted Into a Cultivated Olive Tree**

- Natural branches (Jews)
- Faithful
- Jewish remnant throughout history
- Believing ("Messianic") Jews

- Natural branches (Jews)
- Lack of faith
- Broken off
- Nonbelieving Jews



## 11:18 - The Root Supports You [\[listen\]](#)

• **"do not boast"**

"Boast" is *katakauchō* meaning "to look down on," "to despise," indicating a feeling of comparative superiority.

• **"the root supports you"**

The root of a plant provides the very basis for the continued survival of the branches. The root can survive without the branches--even sprouting new branches, but the branches are *absolutely dependent* upon the root.

- **Salvation is of the Jews**

The covenants of promise, such as the Abrahamic Covenant ([Gen. 12:3](#)), and the New Covenant ([Jer. 31:31](#)), were given to the *Jews* --through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Believing Gentiles only participate on account of their identity with Jesus Christ, Himself the ultimate representative of Israel.

## 11:19-20 - Do Not be Haughty [\[listen\]](#)

- **"... you stand by faith. Do not be haughty"**

Do not think highly of yourself because the means by which you were grafted in the place of the broken off natural branches is **faith alone**. Your salvation by grace through faith is a gift of God *given without regard for merit* ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)).

## 11:21 - He May Not Spare You [\[listen\]](#)

- **Natural Branches Favored**

The natural branches were cultivated by God. The Jews occupied a favored position according to God's election of the nation Israel ([Deu. 7:6-8](#); [14:1-2](#); [Ps. 135:4](#)).

- **Even Natural Branches Were Not Spared**

Even though the natural branches had been cultivated by God and given tremendous promises, **faith** was still required in order to remain in the olive tree. Paul emphasizes that if it was possible for God to break off *natural* branches which have an affinity for the cultivated tree, how much easier it would be to break off the *wild* branches only recently grafted in!

## 11:22 - Goodness and Severity [\[listen\]](#)

- **"on those who fell, severity"**

God's severity fell on those Jews who failed to exercise faith and rejected Messiah Jesus at His presentation to Israel ([Zec. 9:9](#); [Mtt. 21:4-5](#)).

- **"toward you, goodness"**

The Gentiles of faith must remember that they only occupy their position in the tree because of God's unmerited grace. In both severity or goodness, it is *God's sovereignty* which ultimately is the source of what has taken place. **If some of the natural branches fell, so could some of the wild branches!**

- **"if you continue... otherwise you also will be cut off"**

In the same way that individuals among Israel did not continue in faith and fell from God's grace, so too will it be with the Gentiles. This verse reinforces the scriptural truth that true faith continues whereas professed faith may wane and show itself for that which it truly is--not faith at all. Therefore, Paul exhorts believers to examine themselves to see whether they are in the faith ([2Cor. 13:5](#)). Those who are truly saved cannot lose their salvation:

1) They are sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of their redemption ([2Cor. 1:21-22](#); [5:4-6](#); [Eph. 1:13-14](#)).

2) They *have* eternal life *having passed* from death to life ([John 5:24](#)).

3) Those who 'fall away' were *never known* by Jesus ([Mtt. 7:21-23](#)).

## 11:23 - Grafted In Again [\[listen\]](#)

- **"if they do not continue in unbelief"**  
Israel has not fallen permanently to be "replaced by the Church." If Israel, as a nation of individuals, comes to faith by some means, then God is able to graft them into the natural olive tree again. As we will shortly see, this is the very thing predicted by Scripture ([Rom. 11:25-26](#)).

## 11:24 - Their Own Olive Tree [\[listen\]](#)

- **"grafted contrary to nature"**  
The Torah (Law of Moses), and various other promises and covenants were not given to the Gentiles, but to Israel ([Eph. 2:11-13](#)). It is not "natural" for Gentiles to be partaking in what is essentially a Jewish faith (Christianity) founded on a Jewish promise -- the New Covenant ([Jer. 31:31](#)). It is only by God's grace and the faith of Gentiles in Jesus, Himself born a Jew, that this situation has come to exist.
- **"how much more these"**  
Never forget that the future task of turning the unbelieving among Israel back to faith prior to the Second Coming will be *considerably easier* than what God accomplished at the First Coming of Christ when the Gentiles came to faith in what is essentially a foreign Jewish Messiah: Jesus.
- **"grafted into their own olive tree"**  
Writing after the cross and the rejection of Messiah Jesus by the majority in Israel, Paul still refers to the cultivated olive tree as the Jews' "own tree." The tree and the promises associated with the root are *theirs* and we who are believing Gentiles are the outsiders who, by God's grace, are participating in their promises ([Rom. 9:4](#); [Eph 2:12](#)).

## Application

1. **Salvation is of the Jews** - Take note: believing Gentiles are not called "natural branches," but rather "wild branches" grafted in among believing Jews. This is a clear indication of the Jewishness of the roots of Christianity. As Gentiles, we should seek to understand the Jewish context of Christianity in order to better understand Scripture. Also: the fact that we, as clueless Gentiles, have come to faith in a Jewish Messiah through Jewish Scriptures should tell us just how easily God can graft Jews back into their position as people of faith.
2. **If the Root is Holy, so are the Branches** - All branches, even those broken off by God, are "holy" in the sense of being set aside to fulfill God's purpose for the nation. We will see in the next few verses that even nonbelieving Jews, as part of Israel, are to be loved on account of their role in the plan and purpose of God.
3. **Believing Gentiles are not the "New Israel"** - Israel is the same old Israel. The analogy Paul uses involves three main components, not two: (1) the natural branches (Jews); (2) the wild branches (Gentiles); and (3) the root and fatness which supports them both (the promises and covenants via the fathers). The wild branches (believing Gentiles) do not become natural branches (Jews). Nor are they grafted *into* the natural branches. *both* natural and wild branches participate in the root and fatness. Both wild and natural branches are joined into the same cultivated tree. This is a removal of the wall of separation between the natural and wild branches forming "one new man from the two" ([Eph. 2:15](#)).