

The Apostle Paul's Olive Tree Analogy

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Theme: Israel in the light of God's sovereign election and mercy

*I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.
Romans 11:25 NIV*

Israel's **corporate** election (calling) has been temporarily suspended.
Click [HERE](#) to open an additional graphic which illustrates this suspension.

Introduction & Background

The Jews knew that God had exclusively dealt with the Patriarchs and the Nation for nearly two millennia (Deuteronomy 7:6-8), and had provided for those who were not the "seed of Abraham" to participate in Judaism (Acts 13:26). Israel had been God's exclusive *sphere* of election (calling)--His beloved vineyard (Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 7:6; Matt. 21:33-39). Understandably, the Jews found it near impossible to let go of the idea of their favored and separated status.

But with Pentecost things began to change. At first the Jewish believers struggled with the truth that the new work of the Holy Spirit did not recognize their religious tradition that required strict separation between Jew and Gentile. It would require a special miracle (Acts 10) to alter Peter's mindset that Gentiles were not racially "unclean." (Acts 10:28). In time, other Jewish believers would have to alter their thinking as well.

Little did they fathom that the Heavenly Church was neither prophesied nor revealed in OT Scriptures and was a complete *mystery* until revealed doctrinally by the Apostle Paul. To Paul would fall the task of explaining several *mysteries* [truths previously hidden, but then revealed] to both his Jewish brethren as well as the new Gentile believers.

In Romans 8:29-30, the Apostle Paul proclaims a number of unique biblical truths: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, sanctification--the Father's grand purpose of conforming new creation believers to the likeness of his Son, glorification, as well as the fact that God is assuredly bringing all to a glorious consummation. With this having been said, Paul then turns to the subject of **Israel's** current status (Lo-ammi, *not my people*) with Jehovah.

Please open your Bible to Paul's epistle to the Romans and read along.

ROMANS Chapter 9:

1-5	Something very troubling <i>appears</i> to have befallen Paul's kinsman and the apostle pours forth heart-felt emotion as he reflects upon Israel's <i>corporate</i> election and their unique, eight-fold inheritance (verses 4-5).
6-9	For consolation, he explains that <i>individual</i> election has occurred within the sphere of Israel's <i>corporate</i> election.

10-14	All (both Jew and Gentile) must understand that the <i>basis</i> of all election lies with God, not man. It is not based on "doing anything good or bad," from a human perspective, nor is it based on "works". Further, God is not unjust in this matter.
15-18	The <i>basis</i> for election includes the display of God's attributes of "mercy", "compassion", "power", "glory", and "wisdom" -- cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. Election has nothing to do with human "desire or effort", and everything to do with God's attribute of mercy.
19-24	Does sovereign election and man's lack of free will undermine human responsibility? No! In spite of men's feeble attempts to rationalize, the Holy Spirit speaking through Paul says, "No!" Men have volition and are active participants in the drama of God's provision of redemption.
25-29	The Jews had played the 'race card', and God used it against them. Israel, God's elect Nation, is set aside. <i>Corporate</i> plus <i>individual</i> election, not racial ethnicity and works, is the basis for salvation of either Jew or non-Jew.
30-33	Paul now reiterates some key concepts which he developed in earlier chapters and will touch upon again in chapters 10 and 11: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Righteousness is based on <i>individual</i> sovereign election, (God's mercy and grace the cause), and is appropriated by means of personal faith, not human works. b. The Jewish nation's <i>corporate</i> election did not guarantee individual righteousness and a majority of the Israelites missed this truth. This occurred in fulfillment of the prophetic Word.

ROMANS Chapter 10:

1-11	Paul's heart yearns for Israel's salvation. He acknowledges their religious zeal, but their zeal lacks understanding--a polite way of saying they're ignorant of <u>spiritual</u> truth. Without a clear understanding of either the cause (election via grace) and/or the means (faith via human volition) as the basis for personal righteousness, the Jew seeks to "establish their own" approach to righteousness via Moses' law and the principle of merit.
12	Jews continue to have a problem understanding how the Holy Spirit is at work amongst the Gentiles. They must be repetitively reminded that a substantial change has taken place.
16-21	Again, <i>corporate</i> election does not automatically result in individual faith. Personal salvation requires personal faith. God's plan was to temporarily set aside Israel's <i>corporate</i> election, then assemble a Body composed of both Jew and non-Jew from "every nation, tribe, language and people," the entire world

(the "all")--as a testimony against Israel, as judgment against a "disobedient and obstinate people-Nation". The sphere of *corporate* election became the entire world.

ROMANS Chapter 11:

1-6	While God has temporarily suspended His <i>corporate</i> dealings with Israel as His elect Nation/His elect People (Deuteronomy 7:6), <i>individual</i> sovereign election is still operative upon the basis of mercy and grace--not merit or works. In fact, all election was <u>never</u> upon the basis of works!								
7-10	God has judicially dealt with Israel; they are <i>corporately</i> "hardened".								
11-12	God enlarged the sphere of election ("riches for the world" i.e., Gentiles) to provoke envy amongst the pride-filled and self-satisfied Jewish Nation, not eliminate them forever! Therefore, the Holy Spirit via Paul speaks of their "recovery" (11), their "fullness" (12), their "salvation" (25-26) and their eternal place as "loved" (28-29).								
13-16	Here, Paul casts a broad net and speaks to Gentiles--saved and unsaved. Israel's rejection opens the door to the "reconciliation of the world"--i.e. reconciliation of individuals irrespective of ethnicity. Contrary to the belief of some, Paul is not arguing that the Gentile's <i>corporate inclusion</i> in God's sphere of election guarantees any form of universal redemption. Rather, he is explaining that the sphere of election has become universal and thus <i>individual</i> election no longer is exclusively among the Jews. Gentiles need NOT become Jewish proselytes to be "brought near" to God. cf. Ephesians 2:11-13.								
17-21	<p>Paul further seeks to clarify these truths through the use of analogy. <u>The primary subject is corporate, not individual election.</u> Verses 17-24 must be understood within this context, and particularly the summation--verse 25. The analogy contains six important images.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Natural branches</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">National Israel viewed as a <i>plurality</i>--e.g., the twelve tribes. In verse 17, the "some" are all <u>but</u> the individual elect remnant--the <i>reciprocal</i> of the "some" mentioned in verse 14.</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Broken off</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">To be removed due, to pride and unbelief, from the sphere where <i>individual</i> election occurs.</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Wild olive shoot</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">All Gentile (non-Jewish) humanity, often referred to as the "Gentile nations" or simply "Gentiles".</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Grafted</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Included or restored to the realm or sphere where</td> </tr> </table>	Natural branches	National Israel viewed as a <i>plurality</i> --e.g., the twelve tribes. In verse 17, the "some" are all <u>but</u> the individual elect remnant--the <i>reciprocal</i> of the "some" mentioned in verse 14.	Broken off	To be removed due, to pride and unbelief, from the sphere where <i>individual</i> election occurs.	Wild olive shoot	All Gentile (non-Jewish) humanity, often referred to as the "Gentile nations" or simply "Gentiles".	Grafted	Included or restored to the realm or sphere where
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	God is at work.
Nourishing sap	The activity of the Spirit of God.
Olive root	A source of blessings and life. Paul likely had in mind the Abrahamic covenant which touches Jews directly via Abraham and non-Jews indirectly via Christ. See Galatians 3. Neither the "root" nor the "tree" is Israel into which Gentiles or the Body of Christ are grafted, but a <u>sphere of election</u>.
22-24	<p>In spite of all the Apostle Paul has said, some theologians (typically Reformed, Covenant, and Messianic Judaism) argue that this analogy is speaking of <i>individual</i> election of believers "in Christ" or into Israel's covenants. If this were true, verses 19-21 would argue that believers can lose their salvation and would contradict Paul teaching elsewhere. Such an interpretation does grave injustice to the text.</p> <p>Rather, Paul is warning Gentiles, that <i>corporate</i> election is not <u>unconditional</u>, (neither on the front end [Deuteronomy 7:7] nor its continuation) and that like Israel before them, they can be "broken off", while Israel can and <u>will</u> be grafted back in. Faith, or the lack thereof, matters. Gentile world take heed-- your days are numbered!</p>
25-32	In the most clear words possible, Paul explains a "mystery". God's first <i>corporate</i> sphere of election (Israel) has been temporarily suspended until His work amongst the Gentiles (rest of the world) is complete. Then the Lord will take up His covenants with Israel again for they are "loved on account of the patriarchs" and "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable".

"We may venture to say that it is only in those who learn to regard themselves as the objects of the Divine mercy, of uncaused Divine compassion, that the deepest foundations for godliness of life will be, or can be, laid."

William R. Newell, Romans, Verse by Verse.

Related reading: [*The Subtle Errors of Covenant/Calvinist Theology*](#)

Non-dispensational teachers have endeavored to bring over the many promises of physical and material aspects of Kingdom salvation into the present dispensation, giving hope of material prosperity and physical health, as well as political peace. Failure to realize these promised goals has caused many to lose faith and

to become bitter toward God Himself. The failure, of course, is not of God, but of teachers who have refused to rightly divide the Word of truth. MJS

Examples of erroneous interpretations:

Reformed/Covenant/Charismatic:

Healing, Prosperity and Well Being, by Jay Snell

Non-dispensational, charismatic Baptist Jay Snell promises earthly *healing, prosperity and well being* based on Gentile Christians being grafted into Israel! This sad soul is so oblivious to the Apostle Paul's heavenly gospel, that he demands *materialistic parity* for the Church lest "Judaism be superior to Christianity". Covenant theology is at the root of this 'health and wealth' charlatanism.

Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done, by Ron Graff and Lambert Dolphin. While not as extreme as Snell, both these authors graft the Church into Israel and her covenants. Thus Christian spiritual growth is sharing "in the nourishing sap" (Romans 11:17) and becoming Jewish in thinking and life style.

The description of Gentile believers as wild olive branches grafted into the true olive tree suggests that Gentiles need to become more Jewish in their thinking and life styles as they grow spiritually. When we meet our Messiah and Savior face to face we shall discover that He is Jewish and was raised in Jewish culture and taught the Hebrew Scriptures. He was a devout and observant Jewish believer. Visits to Israel and cultivated friendships with Jewish people are well worth the effort in freeing us from our own ghetto mentalities and the pagan, idolatrous roots from which we have been freed as Gentiles. Chapter 2.

One Continuous Olive Tree, by anti-dispensational Daniel P. Fuller of The Berean Corner.

Messianic Judaism: for an overview of this movement click [here](#).

Gentile believers are Children of Israel, by Shem

Bridges for Peace, Clarence H. Wagner, Jr.

Tzemach Institute for Biblical Studies

Pari's Perspective

The Internet contains dozens of sites similar to these above.