

ROMANS Part 106

Chapter 11:16-21

The nations to be hewn from the olive tree.



Now if the firstfruit is holy, the kneading is also; and if the root is holy, the boughs are also. 17 Now if some of the boughs are broken out, yet you, being a wild olive, are grafted among them, and became a joint participant of the root and fatness of the olive, 18 be not vaunting over the boughs. Yet if you are vaunting, you are not bearing the root, but the root you. 19 You will be declaring, then, “Boughs are broken out that I may be grafted in.” 20 Ideally! By unbelief are they broken out, yet you stand in faith. Be not haughty, but fear. 21 For if God spares not the natural boughs, neither will He be sparing you!

The key to understanding this difficult passage is to grasp the fact that this section of Romans is about Israel and the other nations, and not about individuals. This national perspective started in chapter 9 and continues through verse 31 of this chapter. Once you take hold of and turn this key, the passage is no longer difficult. When Paul says in verse 17, “*you*, being a wild olive, are grafted among them,” he is not talking about *you* Andronicus, or *you* Junias, or *you* Ampliatus, or *you* Tryphena and Tryphosa (the hot Greek twins)—or any members of the Roman ecclesia (read the entire list of names in Romans chapter 16). Rather, he is talking about the nations as a whole contrasted with the nation Israel.

Imagine someone from a foreign country saying to you, “China has you by the throat,” or “You will not do well in the World Cup.” Is this person talking about you, personally? Does China have *you* by the throat? Will you, personally, underperform in the World Cup? No. Obviously this person is talking about your nation, which in my example is the United States. In Romans 11, Paul is the guy from the foreign country (Israel) telling Greeks, “You, being a wild olive, are grafted among [Israel].” It may be easier for you to hear him saying it this way: “You guys (Greece and all the other nations besides Israel) are a wild olive, grafted among Israel.” He is talking about the nations, and not individuals from among the nations.

FORMER LIGHT BEARERS

We now know *who* Paul is talking about, but *what* is he talking about? Due to her apostasy from the faith and her subsequent casting away, Israel forfeited her place as the light of the world. In her place, God appointed the other nations as heralds of light. The “light” is the Scriptures. Any light that we have about God has come to us through these sacred Writings. Up until the time of



Paul's conversion and his ministry to the nations, Israel had been the recipients and caretakers of God's Word. Paul says at the beginning of this section in Romans 9:1-5—

The truth am I telling in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifying together with me in holy spirit, That my sorrow is great, and unintermittent pain is in my heart—for I myself wished to be anathema from Christ—for my brethren, my relatives according to the flesh, who are Israelites, *whose is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the legislation and the divine service and the promises; whose are the fathers, and out of whom is the Christ according to the flesh, Who is over all, God be blessed for the eons. Amen!*

WORD OF GOD

The Scriptures are God's revelation to humanity of His character and His plan. They are the inspired Words of the Deity. Not one iota of God's revelation was given to anyone except Jews. (This continued with Paul, but now for the first time in recorded history, Scripture was written directly to non-Israelites via Paul's thirteen letters.) No one besides an Israelite ever penned a word of Scripture. The Jews, therefore, own one very impressive divine copyright. (Even Jesus Christ—the Christ according to flesh—came to Earth through Jewish avenues as a son of Abraham and son of David, out of the tribe of

Judah.) *The privilege of sharing the Scriptures with the rest of the world is what has been forfeited by Israel during the time of her casting away.* God has now given this privilege to other nations—speaking specifically now of western, Christian nations. These other nations are doing a lousy job of it, but the point is that they're still using Israel's Book.

The fact still stands that many among the western Christian nations may be natural Israelites. The fact also still stands that Romans chapter 11 is considering nations and not individuals from among the nations. Israel *as a nation* is no longer promoting the entirety of God's Word. The United States—*as a nation*—is.

ROOT AND BOUGH

“Now if the firstfruit is holy, the kneading is also; and if the root is holy, the boughs are also” (Romans 11:16).

Paul uses two simple examples to show us that even the apostate Israel of his day sprang directly from the Israel of yesteryear, that is, the patriarchs. This is quality stock. Paul's purpose is to convince the nations of how ultimately odd, unprecedented and, really, how unnatural it is, for the Scriptures—even temporarily—to be taken from Israel and handed to any other people. It is the attitude of these other people toward Israel driving Paul to this course. The nations had become smug, vaunting themselves over the natural boughs, thinking themselves great; unassailable; the unshakable new leaders of the spiritual world. The nations further surmised that, since God was blessing them so transcendently in the wake of Jewish defection, God had also formally “packed it up” with His one-time favorite race.

PAUL CAN'T TAKE IT

Few things upset Paul more than this. Preterists today would call down the apostle's full-blown indignation for insisting that God has abandoned His plans and promises to Paul's brethren according to flesh to fulfill these plans “spiritually” (that is, metaphorically) with another people. Paul could have written chapters 9-11 directly to modern-day Preterists. The Preterist theory is called “Replacement Theology,” and it states that God has replaced Israel with non-Israelites who embrace another message besides that given to Abraham. In spite of the insistence in this chapter of the temporary nature of Israel's national blindness, Preterists continue on their course, making their blindness as profound as Israel's.

Paul first example of enduring Jewish relevance even in the face of apostasy is the firstfruit of the grain offering. The firstfruit, in this example, is a lump of dough made from the first of the grain harvest. God told Israel to ceremonially offer this as a demonstration of her thankfulness to Him for another productive year (Numbers 15:19-22). The “kneading,” in this context, is the rest of the dough. The point is that if a small handful of dough from the greater mass is holy, then the rest is holy, and certainly the forthcoming bread is equally separated unto God.

As if this dough example weren’t childlike (some would say “foolish”) enough, Paul draws upon another analogy—an olive tree. If the root of the olive tree is holy, Paul says, then the boughs are also. This stands to reason, as the boughs owe their life to the root. In this context, the root of the olive tree is the patriarchs, and the patriarchs are inarguably as holy as anything or anyone in Israel. Reason proceeds from here.

SHOCKING NEWS

“Now if some of the boughs are broken out, yet you, being a wild olive, are grafted among them, and became a joint participant of the root and fatness of the olive, be not vaunting over the boughs. Yet if you are vaunting, you are not bearing the root, but the root you” (Romans 11:17-18).

Paul is finished with the dough analogy and takes up exclusively with the analogy of the olive tree. I told you that light via Scripture once came exclusively through Israel, but that now the nations carry this light, never mind their chronic misinterpretation of it. The Scriptures are the light of the world. The olive tree is an appropriate analogy because the oil from the olive illuminated the deepest recesses of God’s temple. God also prescribed olive oil for the anointing ceremonies of kings and prophets. The reason we ought to care about the boughs of this analogy is that “some of the boughs are broken out.” The boughs are Paul’s metaphor of a cast-away Israel. It is another way of saying that most of Israel—with the exception of the remnant—has been temporarily set aside. In spite of this, even an apostate, cast-away Israel means something to God because, as despicable as it is, it descends directly from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—

the root. In Paul’s first analogy, the firstfruit is Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (the patriarchs), and the kneading is the apostate nation. In the second analogy, the root is the patriarchs, and the snapped-off boughs are the apostate nation.

That boughs are broken off the olive tree is breaking news—no pun intended. This event is unique in the annals of Jewish history. We must keep in mind the shocking nature of this revelation to both Jewish and Greek contemporaries of Paul. The Jews had been the apple of God’s eye. Now, they were cast away for an indistinct period of time. You may say, “God has distanced Himself from Israel before.” Perhaps so, but not to this degree. Not to the degree that He now blesses other nations apart from Israel. Not to the degree that, in order to accommodate the revelation, “the eons are [adjusted] to a declaration of God” (Hebrews 11:3; Concordant Literal New Testament). Never to the degree that God brings to the Earth a new gospel.

Such news would have *excessively* shocked Israel. The very consideration of it so traumatized them that they refused to believe it, and still don’t. Their only desire, when they heard it, was to shoot the messenger. Israel has “shot” every messenger sent her. She “shot” her own Messiah. She tried to discredit and kill Paul, eventually doing to Paul what she did to her Messiah—used Rome to do her dirty work. The news of the eonian casting away of Israel startles but does not shock the other nations. Theirs is not indignation and disbelief, but rather smugness and a vaunting over the mother country. This is what sickens Paul. The apostle can’t stand the thought of the nations now considering themselves superior to what they think is a dead Israel.

“YOU’RE THE DOOMED ONES”

Paul now slaps the nations to reality with, “You’re a wild olive.” The retort may have been, “No, *Israel* has become wild. *She’s* the crazy one.” Here is the Zender version of how Paul turns this back on them: “You have no idea how blessed you nations are to be carrying the sacred Scriptures, and if it weren’t for Israel being cast away, you would not have gotten anywhere near these revelations. If it weren’t for Israel, you wouldn’t even have a Messiah. If it weren’t for Israel,





Paul tells the nations that
they were the doomed ones.

you wouldn't even have *me*, the man telling you of all of the spiritual blessings you now possess because of a new gospel. It now behooves you to stop vaunting yourselves over God's holy nation, as though she is some terminally ill aunt locked in the attic. You think that you're supporting this 'poor old woman'? That's a laugh. If you want to know the truth—and I'm happy to tell it to you—the 'terminally ill aunt' is actually supporting *you*. She's not as terminally ill as you think. *You're* the wild ones. *You're* the crazy people. *You're* the sickos, graced by God to even hear a whiff about Him, let alone the message of transcendence that I have brought to you. The 'terminally ill aunt' that you so disparage is on her way down from the attic, and *you're* actually the ones on your way out."

WHAT HAPPENED TO ROMANS CHAPTER THREE?

"You will be declaring, then, "Boughs are broken out that I may be grafted in." Ideally! By unbelief are they broken out, yet you stand in faith. Be not haughty, but fear. For if God spares not the natural boughs, neither will He be sparing you!" (Romans 11:19-21).

Greece and Crete and Macedonia and Asia defend themselves at this point, saying, "But boughs are broken out that I may be grafted in." Paul takes a deep breath and says, "Ideally." In other words, "Yes, you are correct." He then explains the reason of Israel's rejection as the spokespeople of God, saying, "By unbelief

are they broken out." Unbelief, indeed, disqualified most of Israel from entering Canaan. A mere half century before Paul wrote Romans, unbelief robbed Israel of her own Messiah. At the end of the eon, unbelief again opens the door for her to accept Antichrist. Unbelief derails an Israelite's *individual* aspirations, yes, but it is national, not individual fortunes, under consideration here in chapter 11. We are considering the nation Israel as compared to and contrasted with all other nations. As for these other nations, Paul says, "Yet you stand in faith."

Paul's gospel was one of *individual* faith, yes, but that individual faith had already been detailed by the apostle in chapters 3 through 8. Under discussion here, in the same letter, is not individual faith, but the corporate faith of other nations. Without understanding this we will never understand the hard saying, "Be not haughty, but fear."

Paul assumes that readers considering this portion of Romans have come up through the entire letter, starting with "Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus" in 1:1. Paul's contemporary readers would have already digested what we now know to be chapters 3 through 8. I, Martin Zender, the World's Most Outspoken Bible Scholar, have been writing on the book of Romans every week since October 5, 2013. The people receiving this letter, however, would have assimilated it in a single afternoon. It was surely read to them in one sitting. No one who had come through the grace of the early chapters, at seven o'clock a.m. would now read "Be not haughty, but fear" at 10:06, and discard all that



went before. It was Paul who, in this very letter, had written, “Where sin increases, grace superabounds” (5:20), and, “*Being now justified in His blood*, we shall be saved from indignation, through Him” (5:9). Were these amazing things now, a few hours later, no longer true?

FAITH WITHOUT FEAR

The Greek-English Keyword Concordance defines fear as, “an emotion excited by impending evil.” Do you find any impending evil in Paul’s statement of 5:1-2, “Being, then, justified by faith, we may be having peace toward God, through our Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom we have the access also, by faith, into this grace in which we stand, and we may be glorying in expectation of the glory of God”? This is peace, not fear. Before writing in chapter 11 to “be not haughty, but fear,” Paul wrote in 8:15, “For you did not get slavery’s spirit to fear again, but you got the spirit of sonship, in which we are crying, ‘Abba, Father!’”

Which is it? Are we supposed to fear, or never fear again?

God’s Word never contradicts itself. The answer to this apparent dilemma comes with the realization that Romans chapters 3-8 addresses individual faith, whereas Romans chapter 9-11 addresses the faith of nations. Those imagining that Paul’s announcement in 11:21, “For if God spares not the natural boughs, neither will He be sparing you!” sabotages their individual justification described in chapter 3, lack an even rudimentary belief *in* individual justification by faith. Such careless readers cannot but conclude that Paul, in the same letter, sabotages his own argument.

“Before writing, ‘Be not haughty, but fear,’ Paul wrote, ‘You did not get slavery’s spirit to fear again.’”

When confronted with what they think is both justification by faith *and* condemnation by act, careless readers choose condemnation over justification. Justification by faith (3:28) *sounds* good,

as does peace with God (5:1), but both are tossed overboard, without conscience, at the missing of the national aspect of 11:21. Paul cannot but become, to such individuals, a double-talking idiot. Why not embrace the justification and at least sweep the “God won’t spare you!” verse under an already bulging theological rug? *Better to “play it safe” by assuming that the doom is true and the grace false*, is what I think these people think. And so the very apostle who has so recently justified believers by faith, now dooms them—“cuts [them] off,” out of Christ—due to haughtiness over Israel. Grace thus becomes a sham.

Either Paul lied in chapters 3 through 8, or he’s lying here. Or—there is a third option. Paul teaches on individual belief in chapters 3 through 8, and on national belief in chapters 9 through 11—this is the third option. I vote for the third option.

THE CITIES OF THE NATIONS FALL

“For if God spares not the natural boughs, neither will He be sparing you!” (Romans 11:21).

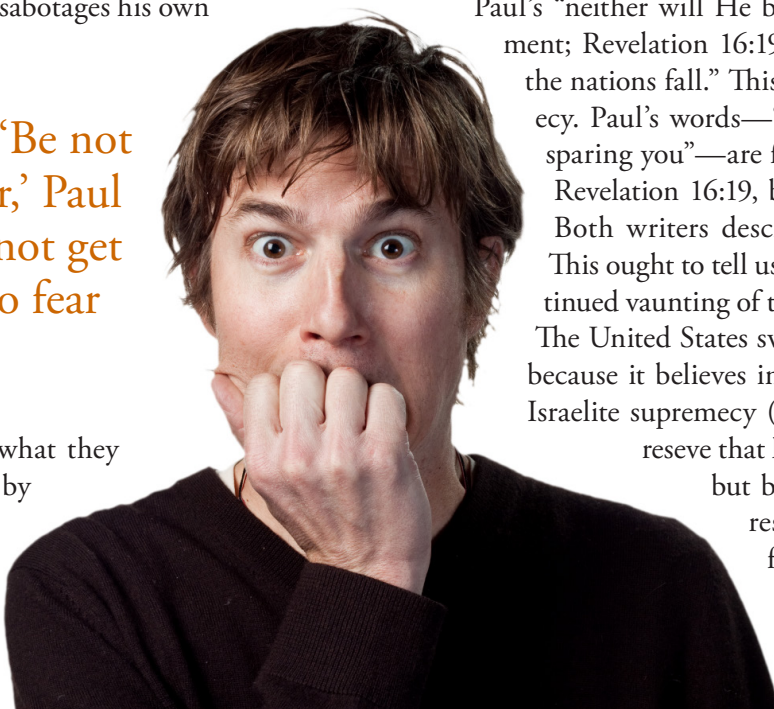
The nations are due to be hewn out of the olive tree. Paul is here referring to the fact that God will not be sparing the nations, but will instead dismantle them at the end of this eon to make way for the rightful rulers of Earth. God will try Israel in the Day of Indignation, preparing her for her prophesied millennial kingdom. A

single verse in Revelation speaks to the fulfillment of

Paul’s “neither will He be sparing you” statement; Revelation 16:19—“And the cities of the nations fall.” This fulfills Paul’s prophecy. Paul’s words—“...neither will He be sparing you”—are far less dramatic than Revelation 16:19, but no less prophetic. Both writers describe the same event. This ought to tell us much about the continued vaunting of the nations over Israel. The United States swoons over Israel, not because it believes in a future, worldwide Israelite supremacy (American Christians reserve that honor for themselves),

but because it’s simply the respectful thing to do for the poor, sick, attic-bound auntie.

Some would say, “God wouldn’t do





that to the nations,” that is, hew them out. Paul replies, “Oh no? Your argument is dead on arrival *because God didn’t even spare the natural boughs*. Not even the natural boughs (Israel) remained on the tree that bore them. You are witness to this; God lopped off the natural boughs due to unbelief. It’s the only reason you’re standing here now. What in the world, then, makes you think that God will spare wild, unnatural boughs that never belonged on the tree in the first place? You nations will be hewn out for the very same reason that God hewed out Israel: unbelief.”

This is quite a warning to the “God is finished with Israel” crowd who today imagine that they, as a so-called Christian nation, are secure in Christ, while Israel is forever extinct. *At least we can try to be nice to her on her way out*. Prepare for a shock, Preterists. Not only is God *not* finished with Israel, but He will crush to powder your so-called Christian nation and reduce to a literal pile of rubble the misguided political aspirations of Americo-centric Christianity. “And the cities of the nations fall.”

The nations—including the United States—are prophesied to be hewn from the olive tree. Paul warns

of it; Revelation accomplishes it. Once this happens, and the body of Christ has been snatched away into realms celestial, God will have cleared the way for the re-grafting of the natural boughs to the tree whose roots picture the patriarchs. At that time in the near future, Israel will at last assume her rightful place as the head and not the tail of all the nations. —MZ

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