

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 11:17-18

Study Notes

Last time: Paul's two metaphors to describe the relationship between True Israel and the Gentiles: Firstfruits; Branches and Roots.

The overall idea: If Israel is God's chosen people, then the Gentiles who have been incorporated into God's family follow the same characteristics.

- **An Allegory: Israel and the Gentiles**

Romans 11:17-18:

"If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you."

In Paul's day, the olive and its vines were symbols of Israel. In Paul's allegory, the cultivated olive is the people of God. Its root is the Jewish patriarchs. Its stem is said to represent Israel's historic continuity.

Verse 17: "If some of the branches have been broken off..." Who are branches that God has "broken off"? Unbelieving Israel: True Israel includes those who have embraced Christ as their Messiah. Unbelieving Israel has been "cut off" from the vine.

- **Jewish by birth; Jewish Forever!**

There was a sense among the Jews that because their patriarchs had been chosen by God, all that was necessary to be part of Israel was to be born Jewish.

Two contrary realities: 1. The Mosaic Code and capital punishment. 2. The Exclusion of Reuben from his birth rights.

- **The Mosaic Code.** The willful violation of the Law incurred swift and permanent punishment.

1. Refusing circumcision: Genesis 17:14
2. Yeast during Passover: Exodus 12:15
3. Copying or wearing priestly perfumes: Exodus 30:33
4. Breaking the Sabbath: Exodus 31:14

Each example prescribes the same punishment: Whoever violated the Law must be "cut off" from Israel. In other words, they were to be executed.

- **Reuben's Loss of Firstborn Rights:**

Reuben's punishment: Genesis 49:3-4

"Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it"

Reuben committed a sin by sleeping with one of his father's wives. Jacob punished Reuben by taking away his firstborn status and the rights that came along with it.

During Israel's conquest of Canaan, Reuben's tribe lost its preeminence to the tribe of Joseph, which split into the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Reuben's tribe never recovered its place in Israel's history.

Reuben was "broken off" because of his sin. He never regained the

status or rights of Jacob's firstborn.

Paul's statement "If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root."

Sir William Ramsay's 1905 article on Palestinian agriculture: "It is customary to reinvigorate an olive tree which is ceasing to bear fruit by grafting it with a shoot of the wild-olive, so that the sap of the tree ennobles this wild shoot and the tree now again begins to bear fruit'.

Paul's allegory: The wild olive branch is grafted into the cultivated olive branch. The result? The original plant comes back to life, and both live in symbiotically. -- A retelling of Romans 10:19-21

Two purposes of Paul's allegory of the natural and the wild vine:

1. To warn the Gentile believers not to presume that they can engage in the same sins Israel did without suffering consequences. (verses 17–22).
2. To offer hope to national Israel that they can still be restored. (verses 23-24).

Three warnings to the Gentiles:

1. The Gentiles are drawing from the Jewish covenant.

By God's design, the Gentiles are not only experiencing salvation, but are drawing from God an incredible array of blessings that could not be available without Abraham's covenant. See: Genesis 12:3

2. There Is No Room For Boasting

Gentile Christians cannot claim that salvation came by any action on their part. In fact, it was a miracle they were brought into the commonwealth of Israel!

3. Who Is Supporting Whom?

While the numbers of Gentile Christians may dwarf the number of Jewish believers, it is the foundational revelation of God to the Jews that forms the basis of salvation. See: Ephesians 2:20-21