

**International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
August 21, 2016**

**Lesson Text: Romans 11:11-24
Lesson Title: Grafted into the Promise**

Introduction

God has a plan for everyone in the world and their succeeding generations. Many people are not aware of this, nor do they care to know about it. As far as they are concerned, they are the captain of their own ship and master of their own destinies. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The Lord chose the Hebrew descendants of Abraham to be His chosen people. He made an unconditional promise to give them a massive stretch of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Euphrates River, bordered on the south by Egypt and stretching as far north as Assyria (Genesis 13:14-15; 15:18; Deuteronomy 1:7-8; Joshua 1-4). He promised to bless His people and bless the whole world through them. But they rebelled. The Jews rejected His covenant by choosing their own way of worship and living. Consequently, the rejection of the Jews would appear to place God's covenant in jeopardy and raised serious questions. How can a righteous God reward sin by blessing unrighteous people? Yet, if God does not fulfill His promises, He can no longer be trusted. Why would Gentiles trust God for salvation if He failed to keep His covenant promises to the Jewish people?

Romans 11 begins with the question, "*Hath God cast away his people?*" (Romans 11:1). Paul quickly answered his own question, "*God forbid*" (Romans 11:1). The remainder of the chapter deals with Paul's question and answer as to whether or not God has cast his covenant people away and substituted Gentile believers in their place. Paul did not accept the idea of abandonment by God. He himself was an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham through the tribe of Benjamin.

Romans 11:2-6 speaks of a "*remnant according to the election of grace*" within the nation of Israel. Romans 11:7-10 speaks of the fact Israel in general would be blinded to the gospel. Our lesson text, Romans 11:11-24, shows how Israel's unbelief provided an opportunity for Gentile believers to be saved and grafted into God's tree.

The Jews and Jealousy (Romans 11:11-16)

Verse 11

“I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.”

Paul asks, “Have they stumbled that they should fall?” He answers, “God forbid.” Israel did not “fall” to the point of no return when they rejected the gospel. The word “fall” occurs twice in this verse. The first word “fall” means “an irretrievable fall.” The second word “fall” means “to fall aside, but retrievable.” Israel has “fallen aside” or “lapsed,” but there is still hope. Is national Israel dead? Paul says, “God forbid,” or, “may it never be so.” That is not the case. The case is “but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles...” (Deuteronomy 32:21; Romans 10:19).

God had a gracious purpose in the sin and unbelief of Israel. He used their unbelief to bring Gentiles to salvation. But that is not all. Paul believed acceptance of the gospel by Gentile believers was designed to provoke Jews to a “jealousy” or yearning for God’s blessing. They, as God’s covenant people, needed to realize both Jews and Gentiles could belong to God through the saving gospel of God’s grace. The rejection of the gospel by Israel resulted in the gospel being given to Gentiles. The acceptance of the gospel by Gentiles has an evangelistic purpose to the Jewish people. It was difficult for some Jews to accept this truth and it is difficult for us to accept this truth.

How does this truth help us today as Christians? It should renew our confidence in the trustworthiness of God and His sovereign purposes and plans. It is important for Christians to know God’s gracious purposes are always at work, even in the hardest of circumstances.

Verse 12

“Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?”

Paul repeats himself in this verse so as to be understood. “Fall of them” is a reference to the unbelief of Israel. “Diminishing of them” is a reference to the failure of Israel to believe Messiah. Paul says, if it was a blessing to the Gentiles that Israel, for the most part, rejected Messiah, how much greater a blessing to the Gentiles and the world is it going to be when Israel believes Messiah? Just imagine what the nation of Israel will be when they return!

Verse 13-14

“For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.”

Paul identifies himself as “the apostle to the Gentiles,” but he says, I want you to understand I have a Jewish ministry. There were some in Paul's own race who would have seen him as a traitor because he was an “apostle of the Gentiles.” Paul was not ashamed of his calling. In fact, he said, “I magnify mine office.” “Magnify” is the Greek word *doxazo* {dox-ad-zo} which means “praise, extol, celebrate, make glorious.” It was an honor for Paul to preach to the Gentiles and see them saved while at the same time provoking his own people to jealousy resulting in “some” being saved.

Verse 15

“For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?”

The “casting away” of the nation of Israel temporarily, was the channel through which God “reconciled the world” and brought salvation to the Gentiles. If Israel’s “casting away” brought salvation to the Gentile world, “what shall” God “receiving of them be, but life from the dead?” The “receiving of them” refers to a wonderful time in the future when “*all Israel shall be saved*” (Romans 11:26). This will truly be “life from the dead” in that Israel will be saved from a spiritually dead state and from among those in Israel who are spiritually dead.

So Paul is saying if blessing resulted to Gentile Christians all over the world because Jewish people rejected the Messiah and the gospel, how much greater blessing is going to result for the Gentiles when Israel embraces the gospel? Their rejection of the gospel brought blessing to the whole Gentile world. Their acceptance, Paul says, is going to do even more. In other words, Paul is saying God's works of grace in the present and future are going to be greater than His works of grace in the past. Bless His name!

Verse 16

“For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.”

Paul continues his argument that God’s rejection of His chosen people is not permanent by introducing a horticultural example. “If the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy...” When Israel first entered the Promised Land, the Lord commanded the first portion of everything to be offered to the Lord (Numbers 15:18-21). After laboring all season, a Hebrew farmer anxiously awaited the first sign of produce because it indicated the quality he could expect from the harvesting crop. By offering the “firstfruit” to the Lord, the farmer was saying, “Lord, everything I have is because of Your provision.”

“Firstfruit” in this verse is a reference to the saved Jewish remnant. If the saved Jewish remnant, of which Paul was a part, was “holy,” or consecrated to the Lord, “the lump is also holy.”

“Lump” is a reference to the entire nation of Israel. “Root” refers to Abraham, the father of the Jewish race. The “branches” are Abraham’s descendants. Paul’s point is everything is connected. The “root, branches, lump, and the firstfruits” are all part of the end product, the dough to make the bread. Paul wants his readers to understand Israel is not only the “firstfruits” in God’s plan of salvation, but also the nation in which salvation to every man is “rooted.”

The Gentiles and Grafting (Romans 11:17-24)

Verse 17-18

“And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.”

The “branches...broken off” refers to God’s temporary setting aside of the nation of Israel because of her unbelief. “Thou...being a wild olive tree” is a reference to Gentiles who have believed the gospel and are saved. Paul used the process of grafting branches to make his point that Gentile believers should not become arrogant because they have now become a part of the tree.

Paul introduces the “olive tree” illustration because he knows those listening, who have a basic knowledge of the Old Testament will know the olive tree is an illustration of Israel. Several of the Old Testament prophets such as Haggai and Habakkuk use it to talk about Israel. When they hear “olive tree” they know Paul is getting ready to talk about how God tends and cares for His people.

When Paul begins to talk about “grafting...a wild olive tree” into an old cultivated olive root, he knows it is not normal. Normally it is the other way around. Farmers normally take a branch from an older, cultivated olive tree and graft it into a wild olive root, which would have produced good fruit. To take a “wild olive tree” and “graft” it into an old “olive tree” would appear useless on the surface. No farmer in his right mind would expect fruit based on the laws of horticulture. Paul explains this further in verse 24.

Paul’s point is the Jewish nation is a “tree” from which “some of the branches” were “broken off.” However, the nation still lives because of the “root and fatness of the olive tree.” That is a reference of the trustworthiness and promises of God. Into this living tree, the “wild olive” branches, the Gentiles, are “grafted,” drawing strength and sustenance for life.

Paul's illustration is designed to show his readers and every recipient of God's grace what a surprising and miraculous thing God has done in saving Jews and Gentiles. A Gentile sinner saved by grace should never take for granted what an amazing thing God has done in salvation! Furthermore, Paul issues a strong warning to the Gentiles about "boasting" or their attitude toward the "branches," or unbelieving Jews.

Gentile believers must never forget they are not natural descendants of Abraham, but have become members of God's family by grace. All of us should be humbled by the fact God has included us in His purposes. God help us to heed Paul's warnings to the Roman believers, "Boast not against the branches!"

Verse 19-21

"Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee."

"Thou wilt say then," is Paul anticipating someone in his audience who might disagree with him and think he is wrong. If Gentiles argue that the Jewish "branches were broken off" so the wild Gentile branches "might be grafted" into Abraham's tree, Paul has no argument. He says, "Well." But he wants his readers to understand the Jewish "branches" were "broken off...because of unbelief."

"Faith" is required for eternal life. Gentiles "standest by faith." "Faith" is the difference in becoming castaway branches or living branches. Paul wanted the Gentiles to know "God spared not the natural branches" of His own chosen people and He will "spare not" Gentiles who fail to exercise "faith" in the Son of God. Gentiles must never be "highminded" or proud, but "fear." Instead of looking over at those who have been cut off, you need to ask yourself, "Am I trusting in Christ?"

Verse 22

"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

"Behold" means Paul wants the Gentile Christians to think about what he is about to say. "Behold," or notice "the goodness and severity of God." "Goodness" and "severity" are contradictory. God's "goodness" is God's kindness (Romans 2:4). God is a kind and loving God. God's "kindness" is directed toward "thee," in this context to the Gentiles.

“Severity” speaks of God’s punishment toward those who reject Him. God is a loving God, but He is also a God of justice. God’s “severity” is directed against “them which fell,” in this context speaking of the Jews who disobeyed Him and whose branches were cut off from God’s tree.

For those who “continue” in God’s “goodness,” there is “goodness” and kindness. For those who do not, there is the “severity” of being “cut off.” The word “cut off” is a strong word in the Greek. It carries the idea of something going along in life and all of a sudden, it is instantly removed. Paul wanted the Gentiles to remember failing to depend totally upon the Lord for salvation could result in their being “cut off.” This is not a threat to losing their salvation; it is simply to contrast that God did not automatically save Gentiles because they are Gentiles. The condition is always “faith.”

Teachers note: Please notice the Apostle Paul is politically incorrect! The God who is promoted today by politicians and religious liberals is the loving god of kindness and goodness, but not justice, severity, and judgment. You know, the idea we all have the same god. The god who is the god of the Muslims, the god of the skies, the god of the Christians or whatever, it is all the same god. The god of this world’s making is loving, beneficent, he would never judge anybody. That god has no relation to Paul’s God. Paul believed in a God who loves and saves sinners but also judges sinful man and condemns him to eternal torment when he rejects Jesus Christ. Thank God for men like Paul!

Verse 23-24

“And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?”

Returning to his illustration of grafting trees (adding a shoot of one tree to another tree), Paul make a powerful argument here for God’s plan of salvation including both Jew and Gentile. In summary Paul says, “If God worked for the salvation of the Gentiles, so those who were not a part of the olive tree were grafted into the olive tree, then it will be no problem for God to re-graft His ancient people who trust in Jesus Christ into their own olive tree.”

Paul is asserting here that all Jewish people who embrace Christ by faith will be engrafted into the body of Christ. If “they,” the Jewish people, “abide not still in unbelief,” they will be “grafted in” or saved when they place faith in Jesus Christ. How can this be? “God is able to graff them in again.” If God “grafted in” the Gentiles who were “contrary to nature,” He certainly is “able” to bring back His own chosen people, “the natural branches.” Paul is holding out a firm hope for Israel here and he is clearly speaking about God's ability to save.

Conclusion

God's chosen people, the Jews, must be held in high regard, believing or unbelieving. God's plan for them may at times look like it is going to fail but Scripture teaches us Israel will one day in the future be saved. That does not mean a Jew will enter heaven because of his racial ties with Abraham. Only those who place faith and trust in Jesus Christ and His atoning work on the cross will be saved.

For Gentiles, we must always keep a humble attitude. Paul's teaching should remind us to never become smug or arrogant because the Jewish people failed and we received salvation. Jesus said, "*For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more*" (Luke 12:48). We Gentiles who are saved by God's grace have a responsibility to be wise stewards of the privileges we have been given. We must never lord it over others but be living examples of God's amazing grace.

Amen.