

The Parable of the Olive Tree

by Arno Clemens Gaebelein

Arno Clemens Gaebelein preaches on the parable of the good and wild olive trees in Romans 11, emphasizing the relationship between Israel and the Gentiles. The parable illustrates the breaking off and grafting in of branches, warning against boasting and unbelief. Gentile Christendom is cautioned to abide in God's goodness to avoid being cut off, as God is able to graft the broken off branches of Israel back in. The parable reveals the future restoration of Israel and the sequence of events leading to their salvation.

Description

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Transcript

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 true oneLinerSummary: "The parable of the olive tree teaches that Israel's restoration is possible, and that
 the Gentiles' boasting and highmindedness will lead to their judgment." sermonType: "expository" topics: -
 name: "Israel And Gentiles" slug: "israel-and-gentiles" - name: "Gods Restoration" slug: "gods-restoration"
 bibleRefs: - text: "Jeremiah 11:16" bookId: "JER" chapter: "11" verse: "16" - text: "Romans 11:16" bookId:
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 Thessalonians 4:16" bookId: "1TH" chapter: "4" verse: "16" - text: "Revelation 3:16" bookId: "REV"
 chapter: "3" verse: "16" outline: - heading: "I. Introduction to the Parable of the Olive Tree" - heading: "A.
 The parable declares Israel's position and hope" - heading: "B. The relationship and responsibility of the
 Gentiles" - heading: "II. The Good Olive Tree" - heading: "A. Represents Israel" - heading: "B. The root is
 holy and separated" - heading: "C. The branches are broken off due to unbelief" - heading: "III. The Wild
 Olive Tree" - heading: "A. Represents the Gentiles" - heading: "B. Grafted in amongst the branches" -
 heading: "C. Becomes a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree" - heading: "IV. Warning to the
 Wild Olive Tree" - heading: "A. Boast not against the branches" - heading: "B. The branches were broken
 off through unbelief" - heading: "C. The wild olive tree will also be cut off if it does not abide in goodness" -
 heading: "V. Restoration of Israel" - heading: "A. God will graff the broken off branches in again" - heading:
 "B. The order of events: wild olive tree fails, then broken off branches are put back" faq: - q: "What does

the olive tree represent in the parable?" a: "The olive tree represents Israel, a type of God's earthly people." - q: "What does the wild olive tree represent?" a: "The wild olive tree represents the Gentiles, all who are privileged to hear and come under the influence of that which belonged to Israel." - q: "What is the warning to the wild olive tree?" a: "The warning is to not boast against the branches, but to fear and abide in goodness, lest it also be cut off." - q: "What is the restoration of Israel?" a: "The restoration of Israel is when God puts the broken off branches back on their own olive tree, restoring them to their rightful place." - q: "What is the order of events according to the parable?" a: "The order of events is: the wild olive tree fails, then the broken off branches are put back, and finally, all Israel is saved." quotes: - "Boast not against the branches; but if thou boast, it is not that thou barest the root, but the root thee." - "Behold, then, the goodness and severity of God; upon them who have fallen, severity; upon thee, goodness of God, if thou shalt abide in goodness, otherwise thou shalt also be cut off." - "Thou also shalt be cut off!" applicationPoints: - "We must not boast against the branches of Israel, but rather fear and abide in goodness." - "The Gentiles' failure to abide in goodness will lead to their judgment." - "God's restoration of Israel is a possibility, and it will be a demonstration of His goodness and severity." keywords: - "Olive Tree Parable" - "Israel's Position and Hope" - "Gentiles' Relationship and Responsibility" - "Wild Olive Tree" - "Restoration of Israel" - "God's Goodness and Severity" - "Boasting and Highmindedness" - "Faith and Unbelief" ---

In the next place a parable is given to declare Israel's position and hope as well as the relationship and responsibility of the Gentiles. In this portion of our chapter we find some very solemn truths for Gentiles, and, indeed, as we advance towards the end of this great dispensational chapter, the Hope of Israel shines brighter till we reach the declaration, that the Redeemer shall come out of Sion to turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

"Now, if the first fruits be holy, the lump also; and if the root be holy, the branches also. Now if some of the branches have been broken out, and thou, being a wild olive tree, hast been grafted in amongst them, and hast become a fellow partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, boast not against the branches; but if thou boast, it is not that thou barest the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say, The branches have been broken out in order that I might be grafted in. Right: they have been broken out through unbelief, and thou standest through faith. Be not highminded, but fear; if God indeed has not spared the natural branches; lest it might be He spare not thee. Behold then the goodness and severity of God: upon them who have fallen, severity, upon thee, goodness of God, if thou abide in goodness, otherwise thou also wilt be cut away. And they, too, if they abide not in unbelief, shall be grafted in; for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou hast been cut out of the olive tree, wild by nature, and, contrary to nature, hast been grafted into the good olive tree, how much more shall those, which are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?" (verses 16-24).

The parable is concerning a good and a wild olive tree, branches which were broken off and branches which were grafted in and branches which are threatened with being cut away, and the broken off ones to be grafted in again. Exhortations and solemn warnings are by this parable given and important dispensational teachings cluster around it.

Before we ascertain the meaning of the olive tree, we briefly touch on the sentence "now, if the firstfruit be holy, the lump also." The firstfruit does not mean anything outside of Israel. Some Christians in these days talk about firstfruit, as if in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, the church, there is a select number, which through self-denial, service and suffering obtains a special place and enters into the God-given inheritance first. When we read in Romans viii of having the firstfruits of the Spirit, it applies to all true believers. In

James i:18, "that we should be a certain firstfruits of his creatures," it refers to Christian believers, who were Israelites by nature, and in Revel. xiv:4, "those who have been bought from men as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb," does not mean a part of the church, but the Jewish remnant.

Here in Romans xi for the fuller understanding of the firstfruit, which is holy, and the lump, Num. xv: 19-21 and Leviticus xxiii: 15-17 have to be taken into consideration. We cannot follow this in detail, but rather turn to the main argument of the passage before us. The good olive tree with a root and branches must be considered first. What does this olive tree represent? It is a type of Israel. God hath taken trees as types of His earthly people, because trees are rooted in the earth and extend their branches upward towards heaven and they yield fruit, for which He also looks in His professing people. Jotham's parable in Judges ix:7-15 has a dispensational aspect. The trees mentioned called to be king over the other trees are types of Israel and the bramble is typical of the Gentiles. The olive tree, the figtree and the vine, spoken of for the first time together in this passage, are seen in different parts of the Scripture as representing Israel. The vineyard so carefully kept, in Isaiah v, and the vine yielding wild grapes, applies to this people. "Thou has brought a vine out of Egypt; thou hast cast out the nations, and planted it... Why hast thou broken down her hedges, so that all which pass by the way do pluck her? The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it" (Psalm lxxx:8-14). "Yet I planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed; how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?" (Jerem. ii:21).

Of the figtree as a type of Israel, we read in the New Testament. The parable in Luke xiii:7-9 meant primarily Israel. The Lord came and sought fruit for three years. When no fruit was found the judgment sentence was carried out, it was cut down, but the root remained. In Matthew xxi:19 there is the record of a symbolical action of the Lord. "And when He saw a figtree in the way, He came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever. And presently the figtree withered away." And the withering away, the tree becoming dead in its outward appearance, stands for the cutting off of the nation during this age.

But again the Lord said "Now learn a parable of the figtree; when his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh" (Matt. xxiv:32). The figtree will bud again. The olive tree is not only mentioned here, but we read of it in Jeremiah xi :16: "The Lord called thy name a green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon it, and the branches of it have broken." The olive tree typifies Israel in covenant relation with God. The olive tree stands for the Abrahamic covenant. The olive tree is evergreen. And so that covenant is lasting and forever, and changes not by changing seasons. Israel's disobedience and faithlessness does not annul it.

A root is mentioned and that root is said to be holy (separated). The root is the one with whom the covenant was made, Abraham. But not alone he, but the root is threefold, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the promise is repeated to each. In Exodus iii :15 we read how God names Himself in connection with the children of Israel. "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you; this is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations." Why should He name Himself thus? Because in this root, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God hath revealed Himself as Father in Abraham, as God the Son in Isaac, and in overcoming the flesh and in guidance, as God the Holy Spirit in Jacob. And this root is holy, separated; so are the branches, that which springs out of the root. God's purpose with Israel is, to have in them a separated, holy people. The root vouches for the final outcome. As wonderful as the beginning of that people has been in that separated One, so wonderful, even more so, is their future.

On account of unbelief some of the branches were broken off. They lay on the ground, separated from the root, without life.

A wild olive tree is seen next in the parable and the wild olive tree is grafted in amongst the branches and becomes a partaker of the root and of the fatness of the olive tree. In the wild olive tree we have a picture of the Gentiles. It is, however, of the greatest importance that we see that it is not the true church, which is represented by the wild olive tree. This is often erroneously stated. Later we find the warning, and more than a warning, the fact that the wild olive tree branches are to be cut away, broken off, removed from the root, upon which they were grafted. This can never be true of the individual member of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor of the true church as a whole. It is true that all believers are fellow partakers of the olive tree, and they stand by faith. "Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Eph. ii:19-20). The great mystery revealed is, "that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakes of His promise in Christ by the Gospel." But to say that the wild olive tree represents the true church grafted in, would be far from the truth. Gentiles are represented by it, all who are privileged to hear and come under the influence of that which belonged to Israel. When the natural branches were broken off, God put the Gentiles upon the ground of responsibility, where Israel as a nation stood, and then gives the Gentiles a chance to partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree. The natural branches are Israel and the branches grafted in contrary to nature are the Gentiles. The wild olive tree represents the same "kingdom of heaven" as seen in its mystery form in the Gospel of Matthew in the seven parables (chapter xiii). As we hold this clearly in our mind, the meaning of all that is before us becomes plain.

The wild olive tree, or as we may say just as well, Christendom, is now solemnly addressed and warned in this parable. It is still, "I speak to you, Gentiles."

First, there is the warning, "Boast not against the branches." Then an answer is heard from the side of the wild olive tree. "Thou wilt say then, The branches have been broken out in order that I might be grafted in." To which the Holy Spirit answers: "Right! They have been broken off through unbelief, and thou standest through faith. Be not highminded, but fear; if God has not spared the natural branches; lest it might be, He spare not thee."

This is a most striking and solemn warning as well as a prophecy. We remember once more, that the epistle was sent to Rome and that from Rome proceeded later all the corruption, that leaven, which has leavened the whole lump. If the warning here had been heeded, Christendom, with its evil doctrines and practices, its highmindedness, unbelief, apostasy and corruption would have been an impossibility. But the very thing against which the Holy Spirit warns has come to pass. The Gentiles, having partaken of the covenant blessings of Israel, declare with a boasting spirit, "The branches were broken off that I might be grafted in," and boast against the branches. Instead of believing God's revealed purposes concerning the Jews, the Gentiles and the church of God, Christendom ignores them, and in a spirit of highmindedness and unbelief, boasts of being an earthly and permanent institution, called to convert and civilize the world. Here is the root of all the confusion in Roman, Greek and Protestant Christendom, with its numerous divisions. Christendom having forgotten, or misunderstanding God's purposes concerning Israel, has become a boasting, worldly organization, calling itself "Israel" and laying claim to promises which are Israel's in the age to come. Then the Gentiles have turned against the Jews; having no faith that they are "still beloved for the Father's sake," and that God "hath not cast away His people." They have persecuted them and do so to the end of this age.

This boasting of the wild olive tree is seen in its completeness in the last part of the third chapter of Revelation. There we have the last phase, and the saddest one of professing Christendom, Laodicea. It is boasting in riches, increase of goods. Laodicea boasts of increase in institutions, millions to extend educational work and philanthropic schemes to convert the world, but it is the usurpation of Israel's place and calling.

The warning is, of course, unheeded. God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare the branches which were grafted in. And stronger still, He says: "Behold, then, the goodness and severity of God; upon them who have fallen, severity; upon thee, goodness of God, if thou shalt abide in goodness, otherwise thou shalt also be cut off." How solemn these words are! Did Gentile Christendom abide in the goodness of God? Far from it! It has dishonored Him and His Word and has made and is a greater failure than the Jews did. The unbelief manifested in Christendom, especially in our day, is indeed greater than the unbelief of Israel ever was.

"Thou also shalt be cut off." This is the sentence which will be executed upon the wild olive tree. It corresponds to the word Laodicea: "So, then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." And this judgment is not far away. The apostasy is developing rapidly. God will not permit forever His Holy Word to be trampled upon by Gentiles nor will He stand the ever increasing rejection of the Son of His love, the denial of His Deity and Lordship. "Thou also shalt be cut off!" How soon this may come to pass! The true church, composed of all believers will be taken into glory and then there remains that which boasts and is highminded and upon this professing Christendom the judgment will fall at last.

But this is not all. We reach the climax in this wonderful parable. "And they, too, if they abide not in unbelief, shall be grafted in; for God is able again to graff them in. For if thou hast been cut out of the olive tree, wild by nature, and contrary to nature, hast been grafted into the good olive tree, how much more shall they, which are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree."

From this we learn two facts. The first fact, God will graff these broken off branches in again; He will put them back upon their own olive tree. And this fact brings us back to the question, "Hath God cast away His people?" Surely He has not. The olive tree, the covenant promises to Israel is as green as the olive tree; all that happened is that branches, on account of unbelief, were broken off. The hand which broke them off, and which took the wild olive tree and gave the wild olive tree, the Gentiles, a chance, that hand will take these branches and put them back. Here again it is "life from the dead," that which was cut off is put back; it means the restoration of Israel.

The second fact is a still more important one. It gives us the order in which these events will come to pass. First, the wild olive tree, grafted in, fails, then the wild olive tree branches are cut off, and in the third place broken off branches, Israel, will be put back upon their own good olive tree. To-day we witness the apostasy of Gentile Christendom. The next event will be the removal from earth of the true church (1 Thessal. iv: 16-18) and upon that follows the cutting off of that which is only an empty profession, judgment upon apostate Christendom, and this is followed by God receiving Israel back. This is the teaching of the parable, Israel shall be received back. That the broken off branches do not mean individuals is clear. How strange that men should teach, they mean individuals which were cut off, and that all unbelieving Jews, of all generations which ever existed, will be raised from their graves and brought back to the land to enjoy there all blessings promised to the faithful and believing remnant.

The next and last demonstration that God hath not cast away His people will lead us further in the order of events, when and how all Israel is to be saved.

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