

### 33. Learning About the Spiritual Blindness of Israel

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand why the Lord allowed temporary spiritual blindness to come on the people of Israel. We saw that God allowed spiritual blindness so that spiritual blessing could also come to the Gentiles. We saw that the day is coming in the future when that blindness will be taken away so that both the Jews and the Gentiles can enjoy the fullness of the blessing of God. We are going to expand on that topic as we study the next section of Romans 11.

We go on to read in Romans 11:13-15, “For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead?” Here, we see that Paul began to explain to us as Gentiles how God was working through the ministry of Paul to the Gentiles to save some of the Jews.

Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. When God sent Ananias to restore the sight of Paul in Acts 9:15-16, those verses say, “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.’” Here, we see that God had chosen Paul to take the Gospel to the Gentiles long before Paul was even born. The leaders of the early church also recognized this same call. Galatians 2:9 says, “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” God made it clear not only to Paul but also to the other Jewish leaders of the church that He had chosen Paul to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

In this chapter, we see that Paul said he glorified God for his ministry. In addition to the opportunity to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, Paul also prayed that the Lord would use his ministry to provoke to jealousy some of the Jews and bring them to salvation. Many of the Jews had developed the attitude that God did not care for the Gentiles because He had chosen the Jews as His special nation to bless. They forgot what God had said to Abraham when God first called Abraham. In Genesis 12:3, God promised Abraham, “‘I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’” God had told Abraham that all of the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham.

Paul looked forward to what God was going to do for the Jews. He realized that God was using this temporary setting aside of the Jews to bring the message of reconciliation to the entire earth. That message has given us as Gentiles the message of life from the dead. John 5:24 says, “‘Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.’” However, the message of salvation will also give the Jews life from the dead. Romans 11:26-27 says, “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.’” God

will never forget His covenant with Israel but will one day cause all of the Jews to turn to Christ.

God went on to illustrate what had happened to the Jews. Romans 11:16-18 says, “For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, *remember that* you do not support the root, but the root supports you.” Here, we see that God compared the nation of Israel to two different things. In the Old Testament, the people would give the firstfruits of their harvest to the Lord. God said that the fact that they gave the firstfruits to the Lord meant that the whole harvest was holy. Second, God compared Israel to an olive tree. God said that if the roots of the tree were holy that then the branches of the tree were also holy.

Then, God compared us as Gentiles to the branches of a wild olive tree. God broke off some of the Jewish branches of the olive tree because they did not trust in the Lord. Then, God grafted us as Gentiles who are like branches of a wild olive tree into the good tree. (A wild olive tree usually produces very small olives while a tame olive tree usually produces larger olives.) By grafting us as Gentiles who are like wild olive branches into the olive tree, we have become able to enjoy the blessings of the good roots of the olive tree. However, we are reminded not to boast against the other branches (the Jews). We are to remember that we do not support the root. Instead, the root supports us. The promise of God to Abraham that through him all of the families of the earth would be blessed means that we are now enjoying the blessings of salvation that came through Abraham and ultimately through Christ.

We are not to boast because we have also been given the privilege to enjoy the benefits of salvation. Romans 11:19-21 says, “You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.’ Well *said*. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.” There are some Christians who say that God has forgotten the Jews and that the Gentiles have replaced them. This passage reminds us that only some of the branches were broken off. However, it also gives us a warning. Those who were broken off were broken off because of their unbelief.

We as Gentiles have been grafted into the tree because of the fact that we have placed our faith in Christ. We are to remember that the root of the tree is holy. The tree is still the source of blessing. God is continuing to bless those Jews who believe and He is allowing us to share in those blessings as Gentiles. Galatians 3:13-14 says, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Here, we see that Christ bought us back from the curse of the law and so we now share in the blessings that God promised to Abraham. We have received this blessing by faith.

As a result, we are not to be proud. Instead, we are to have a godly fear. We realize that God could remove us just as He removed those branches that continued in unbelief. That godly fear

will cause us to pray for the day when all of the Jews will again turn to the Lord so that both Jews and Christians can experience the full blessings of the Lord. As Romans 11:32-33 tells us, “For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable *are* His judgments and His ways past finding out!” As Jews and Christians, we can all look forward to that day when we will experience all of the blessings that God has for everyone who has come to Him by faith.

Romans 11:22-24 says, “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who *are* natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree?” Here, we are reminded that God shows both goodness and severity. He shows severity to those who reject the offer of eternal life by faith. Those who reject the offer of God’s goodness will experience eternal judgment.

In contrast, all those who come to God by faith in Christ will experience the goodness of God. The word that is translated “goodness” can be translated “goodness”, “gentleness” or “kindness”. The word is used ten times in the New Testament, three in these verses. It is also used in Galatians 5:22 where it speaks about the fruit of the Spirit. It is translated “kindness” in Titus 3:4-5 where we read, “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Here, we see that the kindness and love of God caused Him to save us by His mercy. It was that kindness that grafted us into the holy root.

God also has a tremendous promise for the Jews in these verses. God reminds all of the Jews that He is able to graft them back into the root again. It is much easier to graft the natural branches back into their own tree than to graft in wild branches. When God made His covenant with Abraham, God was the only One that ratified that covenant. In Genesis 15:7-10, God gave the covenant to Abraham and then told him to lay out the sacrifices so that this could be a blood covenant (everlasting covenant). When it came time to walk between the pieces of the covenant, Genesis 15:17 says, “And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces.” God was the only One who went between the pieces of the sacrifice and so God is the only One who could break that everlasting covenant with Abraham and his descendants. We want to help our children understand that the spiritual blindness that has come on Israel is only temporary and one day in the future God will cause all of Israel to turn to Him by faith. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand this future blessing for Israel.