

God Prunes and Grafts

Teaching Tips

August 21, 2016

Bible Study Guide 12

Words You Should Know

A. **Provoke jealousy** ([Romans 11:11](#)) *parazelloo* (Gk.)—To egg on rivalry or anger.



B. **Casting** (v. 15) *apobole* (Gk.)—Rejection, loss.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Finding Common Ground. Sometimes, people find themselves living, relating, or working with others with whom they feel no common connection, feel separated, and feel antagonistic. What or who can unite all people in a new community with common values? Paul writes that belief in Jesus Christ is a core belief around which both Jews and Gentiles can be united.

A. Pray for yourself that the Holy Spirit would give you clarity and for each student in your class by name, for them to be open to God speaking through the lesson this week.

B. Complete Lesson 12 in the *Precepts For Living*® Personal Study Guide.

C. Reread the Focal Verses in a modern translation.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Read the Aim for Change and Keep in Mind together.

B. Have one person read the In Focus story and discusses Linda's attitude and Sarah's desire for reconciliation.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Have students read The People, Places, and Times; Background; and In Depth.

B. Write two questions where the class can see them: Is the Jewish nation no longer under God's grace? Are Christians now God's chosen people? Encourage the students to use Scriptures in today's Focal Verses.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Use the Discuss the Meaning, Lesson in Our Society, and Make It Happen sections.

B. Connect these sections to the Aim for Change and the Keep in Mind verse.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Ask a couple of students to summarize the lesson and share what impacted them.

B. Close and pray about the specific challenges mentioned for the week.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: God Prunes and Grafts

Song: “Jesus Loves the Little Children”

Devotional Reading: [John 15:1–8](#)



Bible Background • [Romans 11:11–36](#)



Printed Text • [ROMANS 11:11–24](#) | Devotional Reading • [John 15:1–8](#)



Aim for Change



By the end of the lesson, we will: KNOW the details of Paul’s teaching about who are the true inheritors of God’s promise; AFFIRM that God has not rejected the Jews and that Gentiles believers have not superseded the Jews, but believing in Jesus is the fulfillment of creation; and DEVELOP an ecumenical ministry to encourage unity among God’s people.

In Focus

Sarah leaned over and told Linda her news. “I was talking to the Taylors last night, and they mentioned wanting to come back to church here.”

Linda stared at her neighbor in disbelief. “Really? I remember when they left a few years ago, when they got in a big argument with the pastor and made a big show of leaving. It was nothing but drama for weeks.” Sarah shrugged. “Jamal said he and his family have been thinking about what happened, and they feel bad about how they left things.”

“Please. The Taylors coming back is just going to stir up a lot of bad feelings all over again. The congregation was relieved when all that business ended. This isn’t the Taylors’ church anymore, and they’re not welcome. If they know what’s best, they’ll stay wherever they ran off to.”

Sarah shook her head. “I’m not saying they were right to leave in the first place—I remember it just as well as anyone else—but church is supposed to be for everybody. How are we supposed to show the world the Word of God when we’re too busy fighting among ourselves?” Linda threw up her hands. “If you want to invite them back to our church, then help yourself. I think you’re dreaming. But then again, you might be right.”

The Lord desires unity among His people. What kind of barriers have we erected that keep us from being united with other believers?


Keep in Mind

“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” ([Romans 11:22](#)).



Focal Verses

KJV

Romans 11:11 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. 

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?

13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:

14 If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

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?

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

17 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;

18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.

19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.

20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:


21 For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

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.

23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.

24 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?

NLT

Romans 11:11 Did God's people stumble and fall beyond recovery? Of course not! They were disobedient, so God made salvation available to the Gentiles. But he wanted his own people to become jealous and claim it for themselves. 

12 Now if the Gentiles were enriched because the people of Israel turned down God's offer of salvation, think how much greater a blessing the world will share when they finally accept it.

13 I am saying all this especially for you Gentiles. God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles. I stress this,

14 for I want somehow to make the people of Israel jealous of what you Gentiles have, so I might save some of them.

15 For since their rejection meant that God offered salvation to the rest of the world, their acceptance will be even more wonderful. It will be life for those who were dead!

16 And since Abraham and the other patriarchs were holy, their descendants will also be holy—just as the entire batch of dough is holy because the portion given as an offering is holy. For if the roots of the tree are holy, the branches will be, too.

17 But some of these branches from Abraham's tree—some of the people of Israel—have been broken off. And you Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God's special olive tree.

18 But you must not brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. You are just a branch, not the root.

19 "Well," you may say, "those branches were broken off to make room for me."

20 Yes, but remember—those branches were broken off because they didn't believe in Christ, and you are there because you do believe. So don't think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen.

21 For if God did not spare the original branches, he won't spare you either.

22 Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is severe toward those who disobeyed, but kind to you if you continue to trust in his kindness. But if you stop trusting, you also will be cut off.

23 And if the people of Israel turn from their unbelief, they will be grafted in again, for God has the power to graft them back into the tree.

24 You, by nature, were a branch cut from a wild olive tree. So if God was willing to do something contrary to nature by grafting you into his cultivated tree, he will be far more eager to graft the original branches back into the tree where they belong.

The People, Places, and Times

Natural branches. Natural branches on a tree are the original branches, and in this passage, they symbolize the Jewish people or the Israelites. The Israelites/Jews were the first people assigned by God to be holy, a people separate from all others, representing Him. They were to revere God and encourage others to do the same. God intended for them to lead the way for the Messiah ([Genesis 3:15](#), [12:1–3](#)).

Roots. The Jews, especially the patriarchs, are also considered the root of the tree in Paul's illustration, recognizing them as the originators of the olive tree, giving nourishment. Everything springs from the root. God chose the patriarchs and separated them from the other nations exclusively for His use. God called Abraham out of his native land of Haran, and Abraham went to Canaan as God commanded ([Genesis 12:1–6](#)). Therefore, the generations after Abraham are blessed and entitled to God's promises, despite their disobedience.

Grafted in branches. Paul uses branches grafted in to symbolize the Gentiles, which can refer to nations or peoples generally, but in the Bible generally refers to peoples other than the Israelites/Jews. These peoples are now attached to God's people through faith in Christ, although they were not originally included in the promise. Paul warns that the root, the Jews, could be cut off if they do not accept the Gentiles into God's people, but in Paul's vision of the eschaton, God will find a way for all the Jews and for the believing Gentiles to be a part of the olive tree.

Background

God intended for mankind from all walks of life to come together in unity ([Matthew 8:11](#); [Romans 11:25](#)). His plan for this grand family reunion spanned all human history. First, everyone who ever lived on the earth proceeded from one man, Adam ([Acts 17:26](#)). All races were reproduced through the sons of Noah ([Genesis 10](#)), and God promised all people would be blessed through Abraham ([Genesis 12:3](#)).

God initially worked through the Jewish race. Some inaccurately concluded that since the Jews were His chosen people, He was set against the other races. Not so. Throughout history are hints of this mystery of God's goodness toward the Gentile nations ([Romans 11:25](#)). God miraculously worked through His servants to perform miracles for Gentiles (Elijah and the widow, [1 Kings 17:13–24](#); Jesus and the centurion, [Matthew 8:5–13](#)). God

appointed Gentile rulers, calling them His servants ([Jeremiah 43:10](#)) and using them to divinely preserve and give provisions to His chosen people (King Cyrus, [Ezra 1:1–4](#); King Darius, [Ezra 6:1–12](#); King Ahasuerus, [Esther 8:3–14](#); Nebuchadnezzar, [Daniel 3:28–30](#)).

These examples from Scripture indicate God had no displeasure with races coming together. The problem arose when the some of hte Israelites/Jews came under the influence of the ungodly Gentile nations. The Jews began to mix the worship of the true God with other gods.

In the end, God's saints will gather from everywhere, and all nationalities will come around God's throne, in the presence of the Lamb, praising Him ([Revelation 7:9](#)).

At-A-Glance

1. The Fall Resulted in Fortune ([Romans 11:11–12](#))
2. The Dead Brought Back to Life (vv. 13–15)
3. The Cultivated and the Wild Olive Tree (vv. 16–17)
4. The Prideful and the Humble (vv. 18–24)

In Depth

1. The Fall Resulted in Fortune ([Romans 11:11–12](#))

In the beginning of this chapter, Paul addresses the restoration of Israel and the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's promise. Paul whole-heartedly believes that even the Jews who do not accept Jesus as the Messiah continue to be a part of God's plan, but for a time their hearts are hardened. He uses himself as an example—an Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin (v. 1), reminding the Jews and Gentiles in the church that more than once God's own people have fought against Him, but each time He has responded with grace (vv. 3–5). So too at this time, the hearts of some of the Jews are turned against God's plan through Christ, but God has not rejected them completely.

Paul continues in vv. 11–12 by asking if the Jews have stumbled and fallen, concluding that their stumbling has not caused them to fall but instead has brought salvation to the Gentiles as well. This inclusion has made some of the Jews jealous, but God will use this for the greater good as well.

2. The Dead Brought Back to Life (vv. 13–15)

Paul addresses the Roman Gentile Christians, identifying himself as their apostle, having the privilege to bring the Gospel to the non-Jewish world ([Acts 9:15](#)). However, Paul's heart continued to be filled with compassion for his own people, greatly desiring for the Jewish people to come to Christ. He wanted his relationship with the heavenly Father, through Christ, to look so attractive that Paul's people would long for the same kind of experience.

The Jews' stubborn rebellion against Christ opened the door of salvation to everyone else in the world. However, Paul remained hopeful; if God can reject His own people, He can also receive them back to Himself. God's covenant people died a spiritual death when they denied Christ as Messiah. However, God will totally restore their spiritual life and privileges when they accept the truth about Jesus ([Romans 11:24–25](#); [Ezekiel 37:1–14](#)).

3. The Cultivated and the Wild Olive Tree (vv. 16–17)

Paul built a strong case that God is not finished with the Jewish people, but regards them as the life-giving tree. Paul pointed to Abraham and other patriarchs like Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. God set them apart for His special plans

and purposes, so the remaining members of the patriarchal family and their future descendants are also considered sacred, designated to live by God's agenda.

The firstfruit offering illustrates Israel as God's possession. When one small part of a lump of dough is presented to God as an offering, it represents the rest. The tiny dough piece for the offering and the entire lump all belong to God ([Numbers 15:20–21](#)).

God broke off some of the branches of the cultivated olive tree in order to keep the tree holy. On the other hand, the wild olive shoot represented the Gentiles, some of whom wholeheartedly embraced Christ. After His crucifixion and the coming of the Holy Spirit, many Gentiles accepted Christ. This group is no longer considered unholy, but now part of the sacred tree.

4. The Proud and the Humble (vv. 18–24)

Paul knows the Gentiles, at this time, the majority in the Roman church, might take God's goodness for granted. As a precaution, he attempted to eliminate any kind of arrogance or superior attitude. They needed to understand and appreciate Christianity's Jewish heritage ([Genesis 12:3](#); [Galatians 3:29](#)). He wanted them to continue to walk in faith and humility, not on personal merit.

Some of the Jews have not accepted Christ as Messiah yet, so their branches have been removed for a time and the Gentiles' wild branches grafted in, but the Jews still belong to the tree. Paul reminded the Gentiles to be thankful because God graciously planted them into the holy olive tree. In His appointed time, He will also restore the Jewish people.

Search the Scriptures

1. According to Paul, why did salvation come to the Gentiles after Israel's disobedience ([Romans 11:11](#))?
2. What does Paul compare the Gentiles to (v. 17)?

Discuss the Meaning

Cliques and exclusivity can be powerful forces in churches of any size. However, God enjoys when He sees His children crossing denominational and cultural lines to fellowship and work together for the common goal of uplifting Christ.

Lesson in Our Society

Racial tension is universal. Groups commonly degrade and look down on one another. However, the body of Christ should be different. Following Jesus' example and depending on the Holy Spirit's wisdom and power, Christians must not put down other races and cultures. Getting to know someone who looks, thinks, and talks unlike you may be a perfect way to learn to respect others' differences.

Make It Happen

Research people or groups in your community who have come from different backgrounds but are now Christians (converted Jews, Muslims, or any other groups who are now believers). Start with prayer. Ask God's guidance and see how you can assist them in helping others come to know Christ.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do.

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned.

More Light on the Text

Romans 11:11–24

In [Romans 9:30–10:21](#), Paul showed that although some of the Jews lost their right relationship with God because of their unbelief, still God had not rejected them entirely. He used two examples to prove that God always preserves a faithful remnant, even when the situation seems hopeless (11:1–5). He then describes the way God does His work in the world—by choosing some and rejecting others—so that in the end, all nations may receive His blessing (vv. 6–10).

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. 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?

In verse 11, Paul began his explanation of how God planned to extend His salvation plan beyond Israel to the whole world, and then, in the end, restore Israel as well. Although Israel had stumbled (9:32) because some did not recognize Jesus as Messiah, they had not stumbled irrevocably. God had a definite purpose in allowing them to stumble; because of their rejection of the Gospel, salvation went out to the other nations (Gk. *ethnos*, **ETH-noce**, a multitude or people; Gentiles, non-Jews, especially Greek Christians in the New Testament). Israel's unbelief opened the door of opportunity for the nations, so God's purpose in history would be accomplished. Israel in turn would be stirred up to envy when they saw the nations enjoying the blessings they could have had. Although Israel had stumbled, the God who makes "all things work together for good to them that love" Him (from 8:28) purposed that the result would ultimately provide the incentive for their return. Paul now argues that if Israel's misstep had brought enrichment to the world and their defeat had proved to be such a benefit for the Gentiles, the greatness of their restoration would be unimaginable.

13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: 14 If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them. 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? 16 For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.

Verses 13–14 constitute a parenthesis. Paul will resume his argument in verse 15. In verse 13, Paul tells his Gentile audience that they were his primary concern by reminding them that he was their apostle and, therefore, should not assume that what he was saying had nothing to do with them, but rather, makes him even more zealous in his work for them. In laying stress on his ministry as "the apostle to the Gentiles," Paul hopes he might stir his countrymen to envy so that "some of them" might be saved (v. 14).

Paul returns to the idea of verse 12 in verse 15. If Israel's rejection led to reconciliation for the world, what would "the receiving of them" mean but "life from the dead"? Paul reasons that if such a benefit flowed from their rejection, a greater benefit may be expected when those who have been rejected are now accepted. The final resurrection is an expression for all the events accompanying the end times, which will come only when God's purposes for humanity have been fully achieved. Paul takes for granted that Israel plays a decisive role in these purposes. The inclusion of that part of Israel as yet unresponsive to the Gospel is an indispensable element in the events of the end.

In verse 16, Paul mixes metaphors to make his point. He alludes to [Numbers 15:17–21](#), which required Israel to offer to God the first portion of its grain or dough as an offering made from the first grain harvested and ground. The cake presented to the Lord consecrated the rest of the batch. Paul wrote that if the dough offered as firstfruits was holy, then the entire batch was holy. The holiness of the first fruits (Gk. *aparche*, **ah-par-KHAY**) ensured that the entire batch would be holy. In this metaphor, the dough represents the Jewish believers who had accepted

Christ (the remnant of [Romans 11:5](#)), and the whole batch those who would come to believe. The metaphor changes to a tree with its branches. If the root is holy, so are the branches. In this case, the “root” represents the patriarchs (especially Abraham), and the “branches,” the tribes and people that follow. The point is that if the patriarchs were holy (and they were), so were the Jewish people. God’s rejection of some of the Jews was neither complete ([Romans 11:1–10](#)) nor final (11:11–24).

17 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; 18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. 19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. 20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: 21 For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

Building on v. 16, Paul presumes that both Jewish and Gentile believers mutually share in (Gk. *synkoinonos*, **soon-koy-no-NOS**) being nourished by Israel’s graced heritage. Both partake in the holiness of the patriarchs, the one historical root of the people of God, and in the blessings attached to it. In verses 17–24, Paul uses the figure of grafting olive trees to illustrate how the Gentiles came to share the spiritual blessings of Israel. He warns Gentiles that arrogance would lead to being cut off, and reminding them of God’s ability to later graft in the natural branches once again.

Paul’s Gentile readers should not view themselves as superior to the established branches. They owed their spiritual existence to Israel; the tree’s Jewish roots supported them. Gentile believers were correct in their understanding that unbelieving Jews were broken off so they could be grafted in. This metaphor should not be taken too literally, as it is not about making more room on the tree. The central point is that now the Gentiles have the opportunity to become a part of God’s people. Paul essentially said: “Well, it is true. But do not forget that they were broken off because of unbelief and your permanence depends upon your continuing faith.” Therefore, Gentile believers were to be on guard and eschew arrogance. After all, if God did not spare the natural branches (Israel), why would He spare grafted branches (the Gentiles)? Paul’s point is that the church is not entirely new, nor a replacement of Israel, but the continuation of God’s ancient people. Thus, he insists that the church is no place for competition but for community and continuity. Believers—both Jews and Gentiles—live by dependence on God and the ancient traditions of His people. The purpose of the olive tree illustration is to prevent any false sense of security on the Gentiles’ part.

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. 23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again. 24 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?

The Gentile believers ought to consider that God is both good and severe. “Goodness,” or that which is beneficial (Gk. *chrestotes*, **krays-to-TAYS**) and “severity” (Gk. *apotomia*, **ah-po-to-MEE-ah**) are aspects of divine nature. The word for kindness means useful and good, and Jesus used it when He said “my yoke is easy” ([Matthew 11:30](#)). Paul’s use of the word “severity” may be a possible play on words, as the root word in Greek means “sharply cut.” This mention of severity could possibly be related to his olive tree metaphor; a proper understanding of the doctrine of God must include both His kindness and His sternness. While on the one hand some emphasize God’s kindness and neglect His sternness, on the other hand others focus on sternness and exclude His kindness. To the former, God comes across as a well-intentioned but doting father, and to the latter, a ruthless despot. However, goodness does not rule out strict justice, and sternness does not rule out grace. The two qualities must be maintained in balance. God’s sternness is seen in His cutting off unbelieving Israel. His kindness is seen in including into His family those who at one time were “foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world” (from [Ephesians 2:12, NIV](#)). His kindness to Gentile believers is, of course, contingent on their continuing response to that kindness. Failing this responsibility will lead to their being cut off, too. Those who do not demonstrate real faith will have no security.

Paul said if Israel did not persist in unbelief, they would be grafted back into their own olive tree (v. 23). God certainly had the power to graft them in again. The only thing that stood in Israel's way was their continuing unbelief. God would never overpower their unwillingness to believe and force them back into His family. The logic of verse 24 is clear. The fact that God has grafted in the wild olive tree holds out good hope of success in the easier case—the grafting in of the branches that belonged “by nature” to their own olive tree. If God can take a wild olive shoot and graft it into a cultivated olive tree (as He did with the nations), grafting the natural branches (Israel) back into their parent tree would be easy. The strength of Paul's argument is that the process he describes is contrary to nature. It is a process unexpected in horticulture. Paul disarms his critics by acknowledging the unnaturalness of this particular kind of grafting. It goes beyond normal grafting practice, as a cut branch would've died and would not have the chance to be grafted back on. However, this is what God has done (and will do), contrary to nature or not. Ethnicity or national identity has no bearing on membership of the people of God. God has grafted wild olive branches into His cultivated tree, and He certainly can graft the natural branches in again.

Paul does not envision the church as a replacement for Israel, nor of separate Jewish and Gentile churches, but rather a church made up of Jews and Gentiles. The God who was able to bring Gentiles to faith is able to restore unbelieving Israel into His one people. If the incorporation of Gentiles into Israel is possible, how much possible is the restoration of unbelieving Israel to the people of God? God is able!

Say It Correctly

Consummation. kon-su-**MAY**-shun.

Severity. se-**VER**-i-tee.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Restoration after Repentance
([Isaiah 49:8–13](#))



TUESDAY

Repent and Return
([Hosea 14:1–7](#))



WEDNESDAY

Repent and Repair
([Ezra 9:5–9](#))



THURSDAY

Repent and Live
([Zechariah 8:9–17](#))



FRIDAY

Repent and Grow Strong
([Zechariah 9:16–17](#), [10:6–12](#))



SATURDAY

Repent and Bear Fruit



([John 15:1–8](#))



SUNDAY

God Prunes and Grafts
([Romans 11:11–24](#))

