

“The Olive Tree: Our Jewish Roots”

March 3 2019

Hosea 14:1-9

We all read. We all read books. And we usually read books we enjoy reading. But, have you ever read “a book that reads you”? [Got this idea from Avner Bosky in his “God’s burning heart for Israel sifts the hearts of the nation” found on <https://davidstent.org> September 29, 2015].

Strange as it may sound, your Bible, as you read it, reads you. So, please let’s *let it read* you today as you open with me to two passages; I Kings chapter 6 and the first Psalm. I’d like to begin with Psalm one. Now, as I read, remember what I said “This Book is reading you as you read It.” And, in this case, God compares you to a tree. So, look for the things *God* sees when He observes you as a tree. Psalm 1:1 “*Blessed [happy] is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. (2) But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. (3) And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*”

Now, why? Why would God compare a person to a tree?

Trees. They’re everywhere; almost everywhere. Look again at Psalm one, verse three. Firmly planted; planted near a river; a fruit tree; a fruit-producing tree; a tree that produces fruit according to its season; a leafy tree; and having leaves that don’t wither. This is how the LORD describes happy people; those who *delight* in His Word.

Some say this symbolic tree in Psalm one is the cedar. Nope; that’s incorrect. The same Book, the Psalms, tells you exactly what kind of tree David is referring to. Psalm 52:8

“But I am like a green olive tree [implying a tree with ripe olives on it] in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.”

The Bible reads you correctly, doesn’t it? God compares you to a tree. And, not only does the LORD compare you to a tree, He compares you to a specific tree, the olive tree; the same tree He uses to symbolize His people, the Jews. So, I’ve titled today’s message “The Olive Tree: Our Jewish Roots.” Shall we pray?

There are some amazing similarities between a person and an olive tree. I did some research on it recently. And this is what I found.

The olive tree grows quite very well in poor soil with lots of rocks and very little water. The reason is this. The roots. They go deeper and deeper into the ground as the tree grows. And it’s nearly drought-resistant.

How is someone; how are you like the olive tree? Well, what can a tree do? Not much. It can stand there. But, what can it do? The only thing a tree can do is to extend its roots to a water source. That’s it. It can’t do a thing about the sun. Can’t do a thing about the wind. Can’t do a thing about the rain. Can’t do a thing about its circumstances.

Roots; that’s all that any tree can put its effort into. My wife can take a sprig of an African violet plant and produce a new plant. How? She places that one sprig into a very small (one inch diameter) bottle water; and just sets it on the window sill and leaves it alone. Then, as time passes, that very small thing begins to extend itself; to grow roots – from a sprig; and ultimately it forms a new plant.

So, when the LORD compares a man or a woman, the happy man or woman, the one who delights in His Word, to the olive tree, He’s reminding you that your main effort must be to extend your roots downward; down to your water source. And let the LORD take care of the leaves. Let the

LORD take care of the wind, the storms, the sun, the rain, and the fruit.

Now, the one place where the olive tree thrives is on the coasts around the Mediterranean Sea. They also grow quite well in Italy and even here in the United States in California.

Who here thinks an olive tree can wither? Look at this third verse of Psalm one; *“shall not wither.”* What does the LORD say? He says that, when you take care of your life to see that you stay as close as you can to your Water Source, Him, your leaves will not wither. That’s a promise. You’ll have plenty of juice; plenty of life; plenty of health.

But, that’s not to say that the leaves of an olive tree can’t wither or that an olive tree can’t die. Five years ago, in 2013, olive trees near Gallipoli, in southern Italy, began to die in huge numbers. It turns out that a bacterium called *Xyella fastidiosa* had gotten into the trees. And Italy produces nearly fifteen per cent of the world’s olive oil. So, lest the pure virgin olive oil producers go out of business, (some of them are five and six generation olive growers) the problem had to be solved. It turns out that that the bacterium comes from an insect known as the spittlebug. That’s right, a little bug was the culprit. So, the scientists set about finding a way to get rid of it, which they did.

And, what I found quite interesting is this. They decided to graft other olive trees into those very same trees. And guess what? The trees began to produce olives again.

And, by the way, the olive tree is usually quite wide at the base and very gnarly. Now, the fact that you are compared to an olive tree and the fact that they are gnarly is not a call for gnarliness.

And just one word on longevity. How long do olive trees live? Olive trees cover over 81,000 acres with 7.8 million trees just in Israel alone. Many, many of those trees in the land of Israel are over a thousand years old. So, olive trees

live a long time. And, on the Island of Crete, there’s an olive tree that is at least 3,000 years old; still producing olives. And those olives are pressed in an olive press and produce the olive oil you used this week to cook. One olive tree on Sardinia, Italy is said to be about 4,000 years old.

Now, I read that olive wood can’t be used for furniture. So, the trees are generally used for firewood. But, what did I find in the Bible? The Bible describes for us exactly the First Temple was built out of.

Quite a few of the pieces of furniture Solomon made for the temple were constructed with cedar, which they then over-laid with gold. But find with me I Kings six and look with me at the 23rd verse. I Kings 6:23 *“And within the oracle [the Holy of Holies] he [Solomon] made two cherubims of olive tree, each ten cubits high [fifteen feet]. (24) And five cubits was the one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the other wing of the cherub [five cubits is about seven feet]: from the uttermost part of the one wing unto the uttermost part of the other were ten cubits [so the wings of the cherubs spanned about fifteen feet wide and fifteen feet high]. (25) And the other cherub was ten cubits: both the cherubims were of one measure and one size. (26) The height of the one cherub was ten cubits, and so was it of the other cherub.*

(27) And he set the cherubims within the inner house [inside the Holy of Holies]: and they stretched forth the wings of the cherubims, so that the wing of the one touched the one wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall; and their wings touched one another in the midst of the house. (28) And he overlaid the cherubims with gold.

Now, verse thirty-one. *(31) And for the entering of the oracle [the Holy of Holies] he made doors of olive tree: the lintel and side posts were a fifth part of the wall. (32) The two doors also were of olive tree; and he carved upon them carvings of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold, and spread gold upon the cherubims, and upon the palm trees. (33) So also made he for the door of the temple posts of olive tree, a fourth part of the wall.”* [The height of

the Temple, remember was about 45 feet high]. So, the Bible says the olivewood *can* be used for furniture.

And, with all the LORD says about olive trees in His Word, the modern nation of Israel has taken that symbol, the olive, as their national emblem. Here it is; a Menorah with olive leaves on both sides of it.

So, you and I, as the LORD's children, when we send our roots down deep into Him, are just like a flourishing olive tree.

But what about Israel?? The LORD has a purpose for everything. So, why would He use the olive tree to symbolize the nation of Israel?

Listen with me to what the Prophet Jeremiah says about Israel.

Jeremiah 11:16 *"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 are broken. (17) For the Lord of hosts, that planted thee, hath pronounced evil against thee, for the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done against themselves to provoke me to anger in offering incense unto Baal."*

As you know, Israel's history is replete with broken branches; the city of Jerusalem oftentimes being set on fire; and numerous times did the LORD pronounce judgment on them because of their sins.

Now, would you turn with me now to the NT; to the one Book in your Bible that says the most about Israel today; the Book of Romans. And we'll look at the eleventh chapter. Now, let the Bible read you again. Here you'll find Israel exactly as the Old Testament describes her; as the olive tree. Turn, please find with me Romans 11:13.

And as I read this passage, the watchword here, remember, is olive tree. The LORD is still, to this moment in time, comparing the Jews to the olive tree, verse thirteen. Romans 11:13 *'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 high-minded, 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 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?"

Do you see the point? You and I, Gentile Christians, are alive in Christ because of Israel; verse seventeen. You see, the Gentiles have always been a wild olive tree; verse seventeen. Romans 11:17 *"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; ..."*

You, Paul says, you Gentile Believers, you Christian, are alive because Israel exists as God's olive tree. Your salvation? Directly connected to the nation of Israel. This is how God sees you. Gentiles, Believing Gentiles have their roots in the Jewish olive tree. And, by the way, if this wasn't true, we

Gentiles, the wild olive tree, would always produce. But it would always, because we were a wild olive tree, be terrible fruit and terrible oil.

The Gentile world, as far as salvation goes, has always been a “wild olive tree.” But, since the wild olive tree, Gentiles, are now grafted into the cultivated, good olive tree, Israel; that means we can and we do produce good fruit and good oil. The moment you exercised faith in Christ, you were grafted into the LORD’s olive tree, Israel.

Look back just a few verses to verse fifteen. Romans 11:15 “*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?***”

Folks, that’s what it’s all about; life out from the dead. God is great in great things, but very great in dead things. He wants every Gentile Christian to recognize that you are connected to His Chosen people. We are alive in Christ. Christ is a Jew. And, the moment we exercise faith in the Jewish Messiah, we are grafted into God’s good olive tree.

You see, God’s heart is for Israel. The LORD says over and over “My people Israel.”

II Chronicles 7:16 “*For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that **my name may be there forever**; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.*”

Amos 9:14 “*And I will bring again the captivity of **my people of Israel**, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them ...*”

Psalms 132:13 “*For the Lord hath chosen Zion [Jerusalem]; he hath desired it for his habitation. (14) This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.*”

So, today. What is it today? Today, Israel is a stump; just like this one. And, it’s true. Many of the Jews are blind to their own Messiah. So, your job and my job is to take the simple Gospel message that Messiah has come to them.

Today, Israel is an olive tree stump. And out of that stump came their Messiah. But one day that stump will

blossom into the most beautiful olive trees. One day, all Israel shall be saved.

You see, olive trees, more so than many trees, can be often appear dead. And, even if that stump is left alone, left alone over time; over centuries. And, yes, it appears to be dead. Yet, quite surprisingly, given the right conditions, it will return to life. It will produce a shoot. That shoot will eventually grow into a branch. And, with care and cultivation, that tree, Israel, will again produce an olive harvest.

Today, Israel is a stump of an olive tree once vibrant and radiant with the love and the presence of the LORD. One day, when the Jews, as a nation, turns to their Messiah, she will again, having Jerusalem as its capital, will be the center of the entire earth.

Whatever you think about the Jewish phenomenon in the world; whatever your opinion of the Jews, this is how God sees them; life from the dead. Israel may be a seemingly dead olive tree, just like this one. But out of it comes a shoot. And from the shoot comes a branch.

And God says this to every Gentile Christian. Romans 11:18, “Do not boast against the branches; you exist because of Israel;” verse eighteen. Romans 11:18 “*Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.*”

Now, one final word before we come to the Communion Table.

How can the olive tree symbol be a help to you and me today? Here’s how. When we mess up; when we live selfishly, when we turn to our own way and when we forsake the LORD, He waits – patiently and lovingly waits – and He exhibits extreme patience. Outwardly our lives become dead just like the olive tree. We become, like Israel, a stump. But, because God has higher purposes for us and because He is so patient, He waits on us to come to a full surrender of our hearts to Him. And when we do, He sends a small shoot out

of our lives and our “stump: become again a living, fruitful, productive tree with lots of leaves and fruit.

Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, was crucified, died, was buried and rose again the third day so that anyone, Jew or Gentile, who will believe that His death was for their sins, that soul will be saved, forgiven, and enter into a right relationship with God.

Shall we pray?

Hymn #415 "We Are Called to be God's People"