

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 11: 16

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 11. We will read verse 16 today.

Paul was originally a person who persecuted the church, yet he was saved by grace and became the apostle to the Gentiles. He also wrote 13 epistles, comprising nearly half of the 27 books of the New Testament. One very important reason is that he was a person serious about God's word. The 12 disciples called by Jesus all came from the lower-middle class of Jewish society, unlike Paul, who had a complete Jewish education and studied under the best teacher, Gamaliel, of that time. Paul was familiar with the Old Testament and knew the rabbinic traditions of interpretation. After being saved by grace, he reread the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, not only bringing forth much light and revelation but also a completely new definition of God's eternal plan of redemption.

He saw that the gospel was to begin with the Israelites; because of the Israelites' unbelief, the gospel turned to the Gentiles. For a period of time, the Israelites seemed temporarily set aside by God, but God has not rejected the Israelites. One day, the Israelites will be received again—what a rich and glorious scene that will be.

In the first half of Romans Chapter 11, Paul focuses on how the majority of Israelites became stubborn and unyielding or pleasure-seeking and were set aside by God. God chose only a remnant from among the Israelites and, through this remnant, spread the gospel to the Gentiles, enabling the Gentiles to obtain the rich grace of Christ. Paul hoped that by magnifying his ministry among the Gentiles, he might perhaps provoke some Israelites to jealousy and save some of them.

In the second half of Chapter 11, Paul turns to the Gentile saints, warning them not to be arrogant or boast against the Israelites, lest they fall. For after the full number

of the Gentiles has come in, all Israel will be saved. Verse 11:16 is precisely the dividing line between these two parts and a very good transitional verse. Paul uses two Old Testament pictures—the offering of the meal offering and the olive tree—to bring forth two important messages. The meal offering serves as a conclusion to the first half, while the olive tree becomes the beginning of the second half.

Verse 16: “For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.”

To understand the meaning of this verse, we must know the discussion of the “firstfruit” and the “olive tree” in the Old Testament as well as their types in the New Testament. Let us first look at the first half: “For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy.”

Offerings are toward God, so that people may be accepted by God. Leviticus Chapters 1 to 5 describe five basic offerings: the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. When Paul speaks of offering the firstfruit, it should refer to the meal offering. Leviticus 2:1-3 says, “When anyone offers a grain offering to the Lord, his offering shall be of fine flour. And he shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it. He shall bring it to Aaron’s sons, the priests, one of whom shall take from it his handful of fine flour and oil with all the frankincense. And the priest shall burn it as a memorial on the altar, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord. The rest of the grain offering shall be Aaron’s and his sons’. It is most holy of the offerings to the Lord made by fire.”

Thus, the meal offering is basically fine flour mixed with oil, plus frankincense; a handful is taken and burned on the altar as a sweet aroma offering by fire to God. The remaining meal offering belongs to the priests. In type, the meal offering signifies the gentle and pure humanity of Jesus Christ. The handful burned on the altar for God becomes a sweet aroma, satisfying God; the remainder belongs to the priests. In the Old Testament, this refers to the males in Aaron’s family.

In the New Testament, according to Paul in Romans 15:16, we are all priests of the gospel. Peter also says in 1 Peter 2:9 that we are a royal priesthood. Priests can eat the remaining meal offering. As in John 6:51, Jesus Christ reveals Himself as the bread of life: “And the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.” Therefore, Christ is holy, and we too must become holy by eating this bread of life. This is the most direct and basic interpretation of the first half.

If we look a little deeper, the Greek word for “firstfruit” is *aparchē*, meaning “first fruit,” that is, the first batch of the harvest each year. In the land of Israel, the barley harvest begins around the time of Passover. Passover is on the 14th day of the first month in the Jewish calendar; the seven days following Passover are the Feast of Unleavened Bread, during which unleavened bread is eaten. During these seven days, there will certainly be a Sabbath, and the day after the Sabbath is the “Feast of Firstfruits.”

Leviticus 23:9-11 records: “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: “When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.”’”

The Israelites were to take a sheaf from the newly harvested barley to the priest. The priest was to wave the sheaf before the Lord on the day of Firstfruits as a wave offering to God. After this, the priest was to offer a burnt offering, a meal offering, and a drink offering. Only after the offerings on Firstfruits could the Israelite people eat the newly harvested grain.

In Numbers 15:17-21, “Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: “When you come into the land to which I bring you, then it will be, when you eat of the bread of the land, that you shall offer up a heave offering to the Lord. You shall offer up a cake of the first of your ground meal as a heave offering; as a heave offering of the threshing floor, so shall you offer it up. Of the first of your ground meal you shall give to the Lord a heave offering throughout your generations.”’” Here, God further instructs that the first barley be

ground into flour, made into a cake, and offered as a heave offering to God. This was to become a statute for the Israelites generation after generation.

For the Israelites, they are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham was called in faith, Isaac inherited in faith, Jacob was transformed in faith, thus producing the twelve tribes of Israel. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob become the firstfruits of the Israelites; they are holy. If the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy. That is, the Israelites who follow their ancestors in faith are also holy.

The Israelites may have observed Firstfruits for thousands of years, perhaps not knowing why Firstfruits was set on the day after the Sabbath. For both Passover and Firstfruits are types of Jesus Christ. Jesus was crucified on the day of Passover, and that year's Passover happened to be on Friday. Saturday was the Sabbath, and the day after the Sabbath was Sunday, or our present Lord's Day; that was the day Jesus rose.

Passover typifies Christ being crucified; Firstfruits typifies Christ rising from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:20: "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Christ is the first to rise from the dead; He becomes the firstfruits of all the saints. When we have finished our life's journey and fallen asleep, at Christ's coming, we will all rise. Christ is holy; the lump, that is, all the saints, will also become holy.

In Romans 11:1-15, Paul separates the Israelites and the Gentile saints. Because of the Israelites' stumbling, salvation came to the Gentiles; yet one day, the Israelites will be received again, and they too will obtain life. Paul uses "if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy" as a conclusion to the first half: the Israelites, because their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are holy, have a holy inheritance and will not be rejected by God; ultimately, they will be received again by God. And the New Testament saints, because Christ is the firstfruit and holy, we all have that holy position and are walking the path of sanctification. When Christ returns, we too will all become holy.

In Leviticus 23:15-17: "And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven

Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord. You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the Lord.” From Firstfruits, after seven Sabbaths, on the day after the seventh Sabbath—exactly the fiftieth day—a new meal offering is to be offered.

We know that all meal offerings are without leaven, for the meal offering is a type of Christ’s humanity. Christ is completely without sin, so the meal offering cannot have leaven; only then can it be burned on the altar as a sweet aroma offering by fire to God.

But the new meal offering on Pentecost is special: it is to have leaven and be baked into two loaves as a wave offering to God. These two leavened loaves typify God’s two peoples: the Old Testament chosen people, the Israelites, and the New Testament chosen people, the church. Whether Israelites or New Testament saints, people are sinful, so leaven is added. And precisely because leaven is added, it cannot be offered on the altar as a fire offering but is waved in the hand as a wave offering.

Why offer these two leavened loaves on Pentecost? Because in the year of Christ’s resurrection, on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out, the church began to be built, and God began to gather the New Testament chosen people. This process continues until the full number of the Gentiles has come in; then the Israelites will be received again. Thus, in type, from Pentecost to the Feast of Tabernacles, God has two peoples, typified by the two leavened loaves: the Israelites and the church.

Next, we look at the second half: “and if the root is holy, so are the branches.” The meal offering is offered to God for God’s satisfaction; the tree is for testimony, for God’s manifestation. If the root is holy, the branches are also holy. From the following text, we know this tree refers to the olive tree. Thus, this second half brings Paul’s warning to the New Testament saints: they must not boast against the Israelites, for the New Testament saints are wild olive branches grafted into the Israelite olive tree. We will share the details next week.

Today, let us spend some time looking at the three trees typifying the Israelites—the fig tree, the vine, and the olive tree. These three trees appear together in Judges 9:8-13, where the trees seek to anoint a king over them and inquire of three trees: the olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine.

These three trees are all used to typify the Israelite people. They have a common characteristic: “for bearing fruit.” They are not ornamental plants. The fig tree has no flowers at all; the flowers of the vine and olive tree are also inconspicuous; they are not for viewing. Nor are they building materials like the cedar, tall and straight. The purpose of these three trees is to bear fruit, though the uses of the fruit differ.

The fig tree answers: “Should I cease giving my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to sway over trees?” The vine answers: “Should I cease my new wine, which cheers both God and men, and go to sway over trees?” The olive tree also answers: “Should I cease giving my oil, with which they honor God and men, and go to sway over trees?”

The fig tree bears sweet fruit for people to eat; the vine bears fruit that can be made into new wine, cheering both God and men; and the olive tree—its fruit is pressed to produce oil, which honors God and men. Let us look at the typified meanings of these three trees.

The fig tree’s fruit is sweet, for people’s enjoyment and satisfaction. The fig tree typifies the Israelites; they testify for God, so that all nations on earth would be blessed through them. However, the Old Testament Israelites forsook God and lost their proper testimony.

Matthew 21:18-19 records that after Jesus cleansed the temple, He went out of the city to Bethany to spend the night. The next morning, returning to the city, He saw a fig tree by the road, full of leaves but with no figs. Jesus cursed the tree, and the fig tree immediately withered. This typifies that because the Israelites did not believe in Jesus, they would immediately wither and completely lose their testimony. This was indeed fulfilled in AD 70: the Roman army burned the temple, and the Israelites were scattered among the nations until the end of the age.

Jesus prophesies the restoration of the nation of Israel in Matthew 24:32-33: “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!”

The fig tree typifies the testimony of the nation of Israel. In AD 1948, after World War II, the nation of Israel was miraculously restored—this is also a sign that Christ is coming soon; the Son of Man is near, at the doors.

Next, we look at the vine. The vine refuses to be king because it must produce new wine that cheers God and men. The vine is for bearing fruit; its fruit can be made into wine, cheering both God and men.

Isaiah 5:1-7 tells us that Israel was the vineyard planted by God. God dug the garden, cleared the stones, planted the choicest vine, built a tower in it, and hewed out a winepress, expecting it to yield good grapes for wine, that God and men might share joy together, but it yielded wild grapes.

Jesus tells a parable of a vineyard in Matthew 21:33-45: a householder planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it, built a tower, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country. The vineyard in Jesus’ parable is the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7. When the season for fruit came, the householder sent servants to receive the fruits (these servants are the Old Testament prophets), but the vinedressers killed them. Later, the householder sent his son to receive the fruits, thinking the vinedressers would surely respect his son, but the vinedressers killed him to seize the inheritance. The householder’s son is Jesus Christ, and the vinedressers are the chief priests and Pharisees of Israel. The householder destroyed those wicked men and leased the vineyard to vinedressers who would render the fruits in their seasons. These new vinedressers are the New Testament church.

Thus, Jesus says in John 15:1, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.” Jesus also says to the New Testament saints in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” Thus, the vine originally typified God’s Old Testament people,

but because they bore no fruit, the vine was transformed to typify the New Testament saints living in Christ.

Next, we look at the olive tree. The olive tree is also for bearing fruit, and its fruit is for pressing oil. Oil in the Bible typifies the Holy Spirit. The holy anointing oil is made by mixing olive oil with four spices. Every item in the tabernacle is anointed with the holy anointing oil to be set apart; priests are also anointed before taking office. The olive tree typifies being anointed with the Holy Spirit and rising to testify for God; it can be the Israelites or God's New Testament saints.

Paul, in Romans 11:17-24, specifically uses the olive tree to typify the testimony of God's kingdom. First, the Israelites testified for God in the Old Testament; later, because of unbelief, the Israelites were broken off, and the Gentiles were grafted in because of faith. At the end of the age, the Israelites will be grafted in again. Thus, the Israelites and the Gentile saints together rise to testify for God—this is the testimony of God's kingdom.

Thus, verse 11:16, a short verse, becomes very rich when Old Testament types are added. May God broaden our vision so that we truly understand the wisdom of God's election. Ultimately, in the testimony of God's kingdom, it includes the church and the Israelites.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! You tell us that if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy. You are the firstfruit, the first to rise from the dead. Because we believe and are saved by grace, we also obtain this resurrection life. Because You are holy, we too must become holy. Help me, in my daily life, to be nourished by Your word and washed clean by the water in the word. May we all become holy to glorify Your name. Bless my daily life. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.