

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)
Romans 11: 22-26a

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 verses 22 to the first half of 26 today.

Paul used the olive tree to portray the testimony of God's kingdom. In the Old Testament, God first chose the Israelites to be the testimony of His kingdom. The ancestors of Israel were the roots of the tree—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—who, through their calling, following, obedience, inheritance, sacrifice, and transformation in faith, became strong roots supporting the testimony of God's kingdom in the Old Testament. The development of Israel throughout history thus formed this olive tree, bearing testimony to the kingdom of God.

At times, this testimony was strong and radiant, such as when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, received the Law in the wilderness, and built the tabernacle; when Joshua and Caleb led the second generation of Israelites into the good land; when Samuel ushered in the era of kings; when King David established the nation of Israel; and when Solomon built the temple. At other times, the testimony was weak and dark, such as when the first generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt perished in the wilderness; during the period of the judges after entering the good land, when everyone did what was right in his own eyes; after Solomon, when the kingdom was divided; when the northern kingdom of Israel set up another center of worship, forsook God, and was ultimately destroyed by the Assyrian Empire; and when the southern kingdom of Judah gradually turned away from God's will, leading to its destruction by the Babylonian Empire, the temple's destruction, and the captivity of the people. In the face of such darkness and weakness, the testimony of this olive tree seemed to be cut down, leaving only the trunk.

However, the remnant chosen by God returned to Jerusalem, rebuilt the temple, restored the priestly service, and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. Just as it is written in Isaiah 11:1–2, “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.” From among this returning remnant came Jesus Christ, who, according to God’s will, accomplished redemption and brought in the testimony of the New Covenant. Thus, the olive tree that bore testimony began to flourish again, and the church was established.

When the gospel turned to the Gentiles, the Israelites could not keep up, and because of their unbelief, some branches were broken off. The Gentiles, who were originally a wild olive tree and had no part or connection with the testimony of God’s kingdom, were grafted into this good olive tree through faith. Paul warned the Gentile believers not to be proud or boastful, for it is the roots of the Israelite forefathers that support the olive tree. They must also continue in an attitude of reverence, remaining in grace through faith. For if God did not spare the original branches, He will not spare the grafted ones either.

Verse 22: “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.”

We read this verse yesterday, but I would like to emphasize it once again: our understanding of God must be balanced. Concerning the testimony of God’s kingdom, God is full of kindness toward those who obey, but He is severe toward those who fall. This may differ from our previous perspective, yet we must remember that Paul here is emphasizing the testimony of God’s kingdom. Those who have already received grace and salvation must continue to remain in grace, ensuring that they maintain a good fellowship with God. Only then can they receive the rich sap from the root of the olive tree, continually supplied with life, and thus be able to bear testimony for God.

Regarding the grace of salvation, we were originally sitting in the valley of the shadow of death, being enemies of God; yet because of His mercy, He gave us His beloved Son and granted us the wisdom that leads to salvation. Through faith, we received grace and were grafted into this good olive tree. However, once we have been grafted in, God's will is that we should bear testimony for Him, manifesting the grace He has bestowed upon us.

Therefore, Paul exhorts the saints among the Gentiles that since they have been grafted into the olive tree by the mercy of God, they should continue steadfastly in God's mercy. This is the lesson of faith as well as the exercise of faith. In 1 John 2:15-17, the elder John reminds us, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

If we are able to continually do the will of God and remain in His mercy, we can endure and abide. But if we become lovers of the world and lose our testimony, God will not hesitate to cut off these branches; just like a saint who has received grace and salvation, yet returns to the world, does not gather with the saints, does not read the Scriptures, does not pray, and ultimately completely loses God's testimony. Although the eternal life received in grace still remains, he is no longer in the testimony of this olive tree. Though called, he cannot become a chosen overcomer because he bears no fruit. The author of Hebrews, in Hebrews 10:24-25, also exhorts us to consider one another, to stir up love and good works, and not to forsake assembling together.

Verse 23: "And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again."

"They" refers to the Israelites. When the gospel began to prosper among the Gentiles and the church became God's testimony in the New Testament, the Israelites fell into unbelief. However, if they do not remain in unbelief—this phrase

in the KJV is translated as “abide not in unbelief”—that is, they do not dwell in unbelief. Paul here does not seem to be speaking about individual Israelites, because once an Israelite believes in Jesus Christ and receives salvation by grace, he becomes a member of God’s New Testament church. As for the church, Colossians 3:11 tells us, “Here there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.” In the New Testament church, there is no longer distinction of race, social status, occupation, or wealth and poverty. Therefore, here Paul is speaking about the collective Israelites, and it also implies that a great event will occur, bringing the Israelites out of the state of unbelief—a collective repentance. At that time, the Israelites will be grafted back into this olive tree, becoming part of God’s testimony, because God is able to graft them back in.

What Paul is referring to here should be understood in light of Zechariah 12:10-14, “I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. And the land shall mourn, every family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the Shimei by itself, and their wives by themselves; all the remaining families by themselves, and their wives by themselves.” This event is to take place at the Lord’s coming, when the Israelites will repent, and God will graft Israel back in.

Verse 24: “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?”

We are branches from a wild olive tree, yet even so, we can be grafted contrary to our nature into this good olive tree. I believe most saints have experienced this, especially when they first come to salvation. We carry the heritage of our own culture, natural customs, and racial biases, which often conflict with what is recorded in the Scriptures. As a result, we may think that God's Word is somehow inaccurate or even excessive. It is only when God illuminates us, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the sharing and fellowship of the saints, that we gradually come to understand His Word and are willing to lay aside our natural notions. This shows that we are grafted into this olive tree contrary to our nature. But the Israelites are different; they were originally branches of this good olive tree. If they repent, God can graft them back in, which is much easier for them, because this branch is being grafted onto its own tree.

There is one thing Paul does not explicitly state here: according to the rules of grafting, before grafting a new branch, the existing branches on the olive tree must first be cut off; only then can the grafting take place. This also confirms that when Jesus Christ comes again, judgment must first be carried out within the church. If we carefully read Revelation chapters 2 and 3, the seven churches represent all the churches over the past 2,000 years. God spoke words of warning to five of these churches. In Revelation 2:5, the warning to the church in Ephesus says, "Therefore remember from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."

Revelation 2:16 is the warning to the church in Pergamos: "Repent, or I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth." Revelation 2:22-23 is the warning to the church in Thyatira: "Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works."

Revelation 3:3 is the warning to the church in Sardis: "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. If you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you."

Revelation 3:16 is the warning to the church in Laodicea: “Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.” May the Lord keep us not only saved by grace but also steadfastly abiding in His mercy, so that we do not lose God’s testimony.

Verse 25-26a: “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved,”

In this verse, Paul speaks of a mystery. A mystery is something hidden that cannot be understood by human effort alone; it is only when God reveals it that people can see and comprehend it in His light. In the New Testament, there are several great mysteries that the Israelites of the Old Testament did not know. In the New Testament, God particularly revealed them through the apostles, and among them, five mysteries are especially significant.

The first, the mystery of God. Colossians 2:2, “That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ.” This is a mystery hidden through all ages, only revealed to the saints in the New Testament. God Himself is a mystery; human beings cannot truly know Him on their own. But in the New Testament, God reveals that the mystery of God is Christ. If we know Christ, we can know God; if we follow Christ, we are following God, for the mystery of God is Christ.

The second, mystery of Christ. Ephesians 3:4-6, “When you read, you can understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” The mystery of Christ is the church. If we are to experience the mystery of Christ, we must live in

the church, sharing together with all the saints as fellow heirs and partakers of the promise.

The third is the mystery of the church. 1 Timothy 3:15-16, “But if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh.” The mystery of the church is that God is manifested in the flesh. The church is not merely a gathering of Christians; it is the manifestation of God in the flesh—this is the true church.

The fourth is one of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. In Matthew 13, Jesus spoke seven parables of the kingdom, and in verse 11 He said, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.” If we carefully read the seven parables, they actually correspond to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. Through these seven parables, Jesus illustrates the future development of the church. I cannot go into the details here, but saints who are interested can refer to the daily readings on Revelation. At the end of chapter 3, I specifically made a correspondence between the seven parables in Matthew 13 and the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Saints who are interested can explore it for themselves, and I will provide the link in the comments.

The fifth is the second mystery of the kingdom of heaven. As in Romans 11:25, it is the mystery of the salvation of all Israel. In God’s eternal plan, when Christ comes again, He will establish the millennial kingdom, and at that time the church and Israel will together bear witness for God. The seven parables in Matthew 13 reveal the mystery of the church’s testimony, while Romans 11:25 reveals the mystery of all Israel being saved to bear witness for God.

First, Paul warmly addresses us as brothers, because all saints in the New Testament are brothers in Jesus Christ, and thus are brothers to one another. Paul reveals to us a special mystery concerning the kingdom of heaven. He also warns us not to think ourselves wise, for this is a mystery. What mystery? It is that a part of Israel is hardened, and because of their hardness, their eyes are blinded and they cannot

see the mystery of God. This is the reason why Israel has not been able to receive grace, and it will continue until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

According to the original text, the KJV translates it as “the fullness of the Gentiles,” meaning the fullness of the Gentiles—that is, the Gentile church reaching its full measure. This certainly includes the full number of Gentiles being saved, but it also includes the building up of the church to a point of maturity, having its full stature. As for what number constitutes fullness, or what measure makes it complete, this remains a mystery; God has not clearly revealed it. Jesus also says in Matthew 24:36, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.” So we need not force an answer. Yet when the time comes, the full number of the Gentiles is reached, and the Gentile church is revealed in its fullness, then all Israel will be saved. Israel will be grafted back into the olive tree, displaying God’s kingdom testimony together with the church—what a glorious moment that will be. As for how Israel will be saved as a whole, we will study that in detail tomorrow.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, how greatly we thank You, for through the New Testament in our hands, You have revealed many mysteries to us. The mystery of God is Christ, the mystery of Christ is the church, the mystery of the church is God manifested in the flesh, and the mystery of the kingdom of heaven is that the church and Israel will bear witness together. Today, while the church is still in the process of being built, we ask You, Lord, to grant us a humble heart and a teachable spirit, so that we may continually remain in Your mercy and not be cut off from this testimony of the olive tree. We know that at the end of the age, when the church manifests God’s fullness, all Israel will be saved and grafted back into this olive tree to bear witness together. Lord, we acknowledge that these many mysteries are often beyond our understanding and imagination. We ask for Your grace and illumination, that we may continually abide in this testimony. Bless the church where I am, and we pray all this in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

