

## Week 2 – Saving the Olive Tree – Bible Study Helps

### Title: Saving the Olive Tree

Sermon Summary: This sermon provides a comprehensive biblical defense of God's ongoing covenant relationship with Israel through the metaphor of the olive tree found in Romans 11. The sermon addresses the false teaching of replacement theology, which claims the church has replaced Israel in God's plan. Using the agricultural imagery of grafting wild olive branches (Gentiles) into a cultivated olive tree (God's redemptive plan rooted in Christ), the message demonstrates that Israel's temporary blindness does not nullify God's promises. The sermon emphasizes that God will restore Israel during the tribulation period when the remnant turns to Christ. Throughout, the sermon confronts common objections to biblical teaching about Israel's future, showing that God's covenant promises are as certain as the rising of the sun and moon.

#### Key Points:

- Israel's unbelief did not surprise God and was prophesied in Scripture
- Israel's blindness is partial and temporary during the church age, not permanent
- The olive tree represents God's redemptive covenant structure throughout history, not Israel alone or the church alone
- Jesus Christ is the root of the olive tree, providing life to all branches
- Natural branches represent Israel; wild olive branches represent believing Gentiles
- Gentiles were grafted in contrary to nature, which makes their salvation even more miraculous
- Broken branches (unbelieving Jews) can be regrafted when they turn to Christ
- The church has not replaced Israel; believers are simply grafted into God's existing plan
- Modern secular Israel represents the dry bones of Ezekiel 37 - physically restored but spiritually dead until the tribulation
- God's promises to Israel are guaranteed by creation itself - as long as the sun, moon, and stars function, God's covenant with Israel stands
- Replacement theology creates prideful boasting against the natural branches, which Romans 11 explicitly warns against
- All Israel shall be saved refers to ethnic Israel, not the church, as evidenced by context in the previous verse and throughout Romans 9-11

#### Scripture Reference:

- Romans 11 (primary focus, entire chapter)

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- Romans 9-10 (Israel's past and present)
- Ezekiel 37:1-14 (Valley of dry bones)
- Jeremiah 31:35-38 (God's covenant tied to creation)
- Zechariah 12:10 (They shall look upon me whom they have pierced)
- Zechariah 14:4 (His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives)
- Luke 1 (Prophecy of Christ's throne)
- Isaiah 11:10 (Root of Jesse)
- Revelation 22:16 (I am the root and offspring of David)
- 1 Corinthians 10:32 (Three people groups: Jews, Gentiles, church)

### Stories:

- The story of Elijah running from Jezebel (1 Kings 19) and God's preservation of a remnant of 7,000 who had not bowed to Baal, used as a prophetic picture of end-times remnant
- The valley of dry bones from Ezekiel 37, illustrating Israel's physical restoration before spiritual restoration
- Joseph and his brothers reconciling despite their betrayal, used as a picture of God's future restoration of Israel
- Agricultural explanation of olive tree grafting processes, comparing normal farming practices with God's contrary-to-nature grafting of wild branches into a good tree
- The fault lines under the Mount of Olives that will split when Christ's feet touch down, creating a valley for escape during the tribulation

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### Discipleship Questions

How does understanding that Gentile believers are 'wild olive branches' grafted into God's covenant tree affect the way we view our relationship with Jewish people and the nation of Israel?

In what ways might modern Christians be guilty of the boasting Paul warns against in Romans 11, and how can we guard our hearts against spiritual pride regarding Israel's current unbelief?

What does the image of dry bones coming together physically before receiving spiritual life teach us about God's timing and methods in fulfilling His promises?

How should the fact that God ties His covenant faithfulness to the ongoing existence of the sun, moon, and stars shape our confidence in His other promises to us?

Why do you think God chose to use the contrary-to-nature image of grafting wild branches into a cultivated tree rather than the normal agricultural practice?

What is the difference between supporting Israel biblically versus giving them a 'blank check' to do whatever they want, and how do we navigate that tension?

How does Romans 11:29 ('the gifts and calling of God are without repentance') challenge or comfort you regarding God's faithfulness in your own life?

In what ways does replacement theology create spiritual arrogance, and how might this same attitude manifest in other areas of Christian belief or practice?

What does it mean practically for us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and the salvation of Jewish people while living in the church age?

How does the mystery of Israel's partial blindness and future restoration demonstrate both the severity and goodness of God mentioned in Romans 11:22?

# Small Group Guide: Saving the Olive Tree

Romans 11 - Israel's Future and God's Faithfulness

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## Opening Prayer & Icebreaker

**Icebreaker Question:** Have you ever been grafted into something—a new family through marriage, a new community, a new church? How did that feel?

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## Introduction (5 minutes)

This week we studied Romans 11 and God's beautiful picture of the olive tree. This illustration helps us understand God's plan for Israel, the church, and His unchanging covenant promises.

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## Key Scripture

**Romans 11:17-18** - "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, boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee."

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## Discussion Questions

### Understanding the Olive Tree (15-20 minutes)

1. **What are the different parts of the olive tree in Romans 11, and what does each represent?**
  - The Root: Jesus Christ
  - The Tree: God's redemptive plan
  - Natural Branches: Israel
  - Broken Branches: Unbelieving Jews
  - Wild Branches: Believing Gentiles
2. **Why do you think God chose the illustration of grafting rather than planting a new tree? What does this tell us about His plan?**

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3. **The sermon mentioned that grafting a wild branch into a cultivated tree is "contrary to nature." Why is this significant for understanding our salvation?**

### Addressing Modern Objections (20-25 minutes)

4. **What are some common objections you've heard about God's continued plan for Israel? How does Romans 11 address these?**
5. **Read Romans 11:25-26. What does "blindness in part" and "until" tell us about Israel's current spiritual condition?**
6. **Why is it dangerous for Christians to adopt a prideful or boastful attitude toward Israel? (See Romans 11:18-21)**
7. **How do we balance recognizing Israel's current unbelief and sin while still believing God has a future plan for them?**

### God's Unchanging Promises (15-20 minutes)

8. **Read Jeremiah 31:35-37. What does God use to guarantee His promises to Israel? How does this impact your view of God's faithfulness?**
9. **Discuss Ezekiel 37 (the dry bones). What does this prophecy teach us about physical restoration coming before spiritual restoration?**
10. **Read Romans 11:29: "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." How does this verse encourage you personally regarding God's promises in your own life?**

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## Key Takeaways

- ✓ **God has not replaced Israel with the church**—we are wild branches grafted INTO the existing olive tree
- ✓ **Israel's blindness is partial and temporary**, lasting until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in
- ✓ **We should never boast** against the natural branches; we only stand by grace through faith
- ✓ **God keeps His covenant promises**—as surely as the sun rises, God will fulfill His promises to Israel
- ✓ **The root (Jesus Christ) gives life to all the branches**—both natural and grafted

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## Practical Applications

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### This Week's Challenge:

#### Choose one or more of the following:

1. **Study Romans 9-11** in its entirety this week. Journal what you learn about God's character and faithfulness.
  2. **Examine your heart** for any pride or boasting about being part of God's family. Remember you are a "wild olive branch" saved by grace alone.
  3. **Pray specifically for Israel:**
    - For the peace of Jerusalem
    - For Jewish people to recognize Jesus as Messiah
    - For the remnant that will be saved during the tribulation
  4. **Be prepared to give an answer** (1 Peter 3:15). When someone brings up Israel in conversation or on social media, can you articulate what the Bible teaches?
  5. **Share the gospel** with someone this week, remembering that you were once a "wild olive branch" and God graciously grafted you in.
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### Deeper Reflection Questions

#### For personal reflection or extended discussion:

- How does understanding God's faithfulness to Israel increase your confidence in His faithfulness to you?
  - In what ways might you have been guilty of "replacement theology" thinking in other areas—believing God is done with something or someone He's not done with?
  - What does the olive tree illustration teach you about humility and grace?
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### Memory Verse

**Romans 11:33** - "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

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### Next Steps

- Read ahead for next week's message: "The Straw Man" - examining replacement theology in detail
- Consider inviting someone to small group who needs to understand biblical truth about Israel

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- Look for opportunities to be "light in this world" (Matthew 5:14-16) regarding these truths
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### Closing Prayer

Pray together:

- Thanking God for grafting us into His family
  - For humility and gratitude rather than pride
  - For Israel's future salvation
  - For wisdom to rightly divide God's Word
  - For opportunities to share truth with others
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**Group Leader Tip:** The topic of Israel can sometimes become political. Keep the focus on what Scripture says, not on current political positions. The issue is theological, not political—does God keep His covenant promises?

# 5-Day Bible Reading Plan: Understanding God's Covenant Faithfulness

## Day 1: The Olive Tree - God's Unchanging Plan

**Reading:** Romans 11:1-24

**Devotional:** God's redemptive plan is beautifully illustrated through the olive tree. You are a wild branch, grafted into God's family not by your merit but by His grace. The root—Jesus Christ—sustains you. This imagery reminds us that salvation comes from being connected to Him, not from our own strength. As you reflect today, remember that God's covenant promises are irrevocable. He has not abandoned Israel, and He will not abandon you. Your spiritual life flows from the root of Christ's finished work. Guard against pride, recognizing that you stand only by faith. Let gratitude replace arrogance as you consider how God brought you into His eternal family through undeserved mercy.

## Day 2: Blindness and Restoration

**Reading:** Romans 11:25-36

**Devotional:** Israel's partial blindness reveals a profound mystery: God's timing is perfect. Their temporary hardness opened the door for Gentile salvation, yet God promises their future restoration. This teaches us that God works through apparent setbacks to accomplish His greater purposes. When you face seasons of spiritual dryness or witness others rejecting Christ, remember that God's story isn't finished. The same God who grafted you in can restore those who currently reject Him. Paul's response to understanding this mystery was worship: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Let this truth humble you and ignite hope for those who don't yet know Christ. God's plans are beyond our comprehension but always faithful.

## Day 3: Dry Bones Coming to Life

**Reading:** Ezekiel 37:1-14

**Devotional:** The valley of dry bones illustrates a powerful truth: God specializes in resurrection. What appears dead and hopeless to human eyes is the perfect canvas for God's life-giving power. Israel's physical regathering precedes their spiritual awakening, just as you may have been physically present in church before experiencing true spiritual life. This prophecy reminds us that God sees potential where we see impossibility. Are there areas of your life that feel like dry bones—relationships, dreams, or spiritual vitality? God asks, "Can these bones live?" Your answer should echo Ezekiel's: "Lord, You know." Trust that the same breath that will revive Israel can breathe new life into your circumstances. God's timing for restoration is perfect.

## Day 4: God's Irrevocable Promises

**Reading:** Jeremiah 31:31-37

**Devotional:** God stakes His promises on creation itself. As long as the sun rises and the moon governs the night, His covenant with Israel remains secure. This astronomical guarantee reveals something crucial about God's character: He keeps His word. The same faithfulness that ensures Israel's future secures your salvation. Your redemption doesn't depend on your performance but on God's unchanging nature. When doubts arise about God's commitment to you, look at the sun, moon, and stars. They testify that God's promises are immovable. This should produce deep security in your soul. If God will fulfill every promise to Israel despite their rebellion, how much more will He complete His work in you who have believed? Rest in His covenant faithfulness today.

## Day 5: Humility Before the Root

**Reading:** Romans 11:17-22; John 15:1-8

**Devotional:** Paul's warning against boasting cuts to the heart of spiritual pride. You don't sustain the root; the root sustains you. This truth demands humility. Your spiritual life, fruitfulness, and standing before God all flow from Christ, not from your superiority over others. When you're tempted to judge those who reject Christ or feel spiritually superior, remember you were once a wild branch. God's goodness brought you in, and only continued faith keeps you connected. Examine your heart today: Do you boast against other branches? Do you think the church has replaced Israel in God's affections? True understanding of grace produces humility and gratitude, not arrogance. Abide in Christ, the true vine, recognizing that apart from Him, you can do nothing.

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### Reflection Questions for the Week:

1. How does understanding the olive tree illustration change your view of God's plan for both Israel and the Church?
2. In what ways might you have been guilty of spiritual pride or boasting against others?
3. What "dry bones" in your life need God's resurrection power?
4. How does God's faithfulness to Israel encourage your faith in His promises to you?
5. What practical steps can you take to remain humbly connected to Christ, the root of your spiritual life?