

What Is the "Root" in Romans 11:17?

03/31/24

by Eric Douma



Interpretive Issue

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Two Issues:

1. **Interpretive:** What context is most important for interpretation?
 - (a) Immediate context
 - (b) Remote context
2. **Theological:** Is there a future promise for the restoration of Israel or is the church the new Israel?

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Olive Tree Interpretation

Premillennial: Nation of Israel will be restored

1. Natural branches: non-elect Israelites
2. Wild Olive shoot: elect Gentiles
3. Cultivated Olive Tree: Israel (Gentiles too!)
4. **Rich root: Patriarchs and promises**

Some Amillennialists: The church is Israel

1. Natural branches: non-elect Israelites
2. Wild Olive shoot: elect Gentiles
3. Cultivated Olive Tree: Israel (Gentiles too!)
4. **Rich root: Jesus**

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Context for Romans 11:17

Romans 11:13–15

But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I might move to jealousy **my fellow countrymen** and save some of them. 15 For if **their rejection** is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

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What Is the Root?

Romans 11:16–18

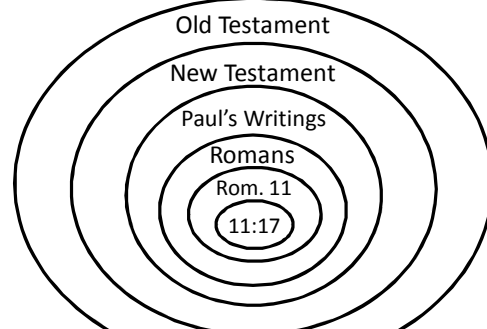
If the first piece of *dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. 17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of **the rich root** of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the **root**, but the **root supports you**.

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Understanding Context



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What Makes More Sense?

Romans 11:17–18 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of **the rich root** of the olive tree, **18 do not be arrogant** toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the **root**, but the **root supports** you.

Amillennial: “...it is not you who supports **Jesus**, but **Jesus** supports you.”

Premillennial: “...it is not you who supports the **promises given to the patriarchs**, but **the patriarchs’ promises** support you.”

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God Is Able

Romans 11:19–23

You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. 22 Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for **God is able to graft them in again.**

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Why This Matters

Romans 11:24–26 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural *branches* **be grafted into their own olive tree**? 25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of **this mystery**—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to **Israel until** the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 **and so all Israel** will be saved; just as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from **Jacob.**”

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How Is This a Mystery?

Amillennial:

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to **church** until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so **all the church** will be saved; just as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from **the church.**”

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This Was a Mystery!

Premillennial:

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of **this mystery**—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to **Israel** until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so **all Israel** will be saved; just as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from **Jacob.**”

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The Promises to the Patriarchs

Romans 11:27-28

“THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.” 28 From the standpoint of the gospel **they are enemies** **(for your sake)** but from the standpoint of *God’s* choice **they are beloved for the sake of the fathers...**

Romans 11:17

But if **some of the branches were broken off**, and **(you, being a wild olive)** were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of **the rich root** of the olive tree

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