

*Romans*  
*11:20-24*



*THE ONLY DISTINCTION THAT  
MATTERS:  
FAITH OR UNBELIEF*

# Romans

## 11:20-24



### SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - "The Reply to v. 19"

***<sup>19</sup>You will then say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."***

The early Church father, Ambrosiaster (c. 4<sup>th</sup> century), gives the true theological explanation:

*"But the Jews were not condemned by God in order to let the Gentiles in. They condemned themselves by rejecting God's gift, and by doing that they gave the Gentiles an opportunity to be saved [by God's grace]. Paul wants to stop this boasting, so that we might rejoice in our salvation rather than insult the weak. For the man who insults a sinner is easily deceived."<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Paul's Epistles*, (Bray, Romans, ACCS NT 6:284).



# Romans

## 11:20-24



SECTION II:  
PAUL'S  
ANALOGIES -  
"The Reply to  
v.19" (v.20)

<sup>20</sup>Rightly so; they were broken off by [their] unbelief; however, you by faith stand.

Paul now gives answer and affirms Ambrosiaster's assessment. However, St. Paul qualifies his answer only in reference to "unbelief" and "faith!"

Soon, you will see the ground or foundation for remaining standing in the tree is NOT human faith, but God's grace (11:5, 6) and kindness (three x in v.22).

Here, we now have a fundamental explanation for what happen to the "some" in Israel (11:17). Everything hangs on FAITH!

# Romans

## 11:20-24



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<sup>20</sup>Rightly so; they were broken off by [their] unbelief; however, you by faith stand.

Going back to 1:16-17, Paul has been stressing faith/belief. This is most apparent in 3:21-31, where “faith” occurs eight times and Paul, similarly, excludes all boasting! Paul also demonstrates that this is the faith of Abraham in Chapter 4 by the use of the noun (faith – πίστις) and the cognate verb “believe” (πιστεύω).

You may ask: What’s the reason for the “unbelief” by “some” in Israel? It’s due to their seeking to obtain righteousness “as if [it could be attained] from works” (9:32; 11:7a). Attempting to “establish” one’s own righteousness by works results in stumbling over the One in whom Israel (and all people) are to believe (9:32, 33; 11:11), through faith, in whom one is credited with righteousness (4:3, here citing Gen 15:6).



# Romans

## 11:20-24



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<sup>20</sup>Rightly so; they were broken off by [their] unbelief; however, you by faith stand.

Consequently, their striving after works is what prompts the “some” in Israel to not listen responsively to or believe the Good News (10:16-17); to their tripping (11:11); not attaining/obtaining (9:31; 11:7a); and the resulting fallen state (11:11, 22). God reacts to their unbelief by breaking off (11:20) and hardening (11:7a)! Yet, be aware, this doesn’t nullify His promises to everyone in Israel (and to all people). A remnant of those chosen by Him remains in His Tree of Grace (11:5, 7). Thus, those who fall into unbelief need not remain in their unbelief (cf. 11:11-12, 23-24).

# Romans

## 11:20-24



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<sup>20</sup>Rightly so; they were broken off by [their] unbelief; however, you by faith stand.

Paul now makes a contrast to being “broken off” by uses a form of the Greek verb “*to stand*” (ἵστημι). The form that St. Paul uses is in its perfect tense that conveys that a past action brought about “by faith” remains in effect (through faith in Jesus Christ). One way to translate this verb is: “*you have stood and you remain standing*” by faith! It is faith, and faith alone, characterized solely by receptivity, which is the only way to maintain relationship with God!



# Romans

## 11:20-24



### SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - "More Admonitions to Gentiles"

***20b Be not high minded, but be afraid. 21 Indeed, if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He not spare you at all.***

Paul will now explicitly warn Gentiles. Again, Paul warns that since their relationship with others (Jews) fully depends upon their receptive faith in Christ Jesus, any sense of self-importance is completely unwarranted and all their notions of superiority must be excluded (cf. 3:27). The Formula of Concord succinctly captures Paul's positive purpose:

# *Romans*

## *11:20-24*



SECTION II:  
PAUL'S  
ANALOGIES -  
*"More  
Admonitions to  
Gentiles"*

***20<sup>b</sup>Be not high minded, but be afraid. 21Indeed, if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He not spare you at all.***

***"This will lead us to live in the fear of God and to recognize and glorify God's goodness to us without and contrary to our deserving, to whom [H]e gives and preserves [H]is Word and whom [H]e does not harden and reject." [FC, SD XI 59]***



# Romans

## 11:20-24



### SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - "More Admonitions to Gentiles"

***20b Be not high minded, but be afraid. 21 Indeed, if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He not spare you at all.***

The Greek word for ***afraid*** (φοβοῦ) is an imperative, thus: fear! However, it's not an admonishment to the Gentiles that they should be terrified of God (and therefore avoid Him), but it is a warning that goes beyond Godly awe. It is an admonishment, however, to remain in faith, lest they too stumble and fall from grace.

# Romans

## 11:20-24



### SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - "More Admonitions to Gentiles"

***20<sup>b</sup>Be not high minded, but be afraid. 21Indeed, if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He not spare you at all.***

Verse 21 continues to convey an ominous warning! The form of the verb “*spare*” is the exact same word that Paul used in 8:32, which says that God “*did not spare His own Son,*” but the “*not sparing*” here hardly is a comparison in regard to the suffering of Israel as a vicarious suffering. However, why did God not “*spare*” the branches of Israel? Because of their unbelief! Once again, if God did not spare the unbelieving natural branches of Israel, neither will He spare you Gentiles if you, likewise, do not continue to stand in faith!



# Romans

## 11:20-24



SECTION II:  
PAUL'S  
ANALOGIES -  
"God's Kindness  
and Severity"

***<sup>22</sup>Behold, therefore, [the] kindness and severity of God; indeed, having fallen upon those, severity; however, toward you, [the] kindness of God, if you remain in His kindness; otherwise, you also will be cut off.***

***"Behold, therefore!"*** With this interjection, St. Paul grabs his hearers' (and your) attention in order to state the conclusion to be drawn from his discussion. Paul's main focus is not upon Jews or Gentiles, neither human faith nor unbelief. Instead, he makes a very important assertion about God! And Paul draws this theological truth by the use of an analogy: The Olive-Tree.

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## 11:20-24



### SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - "God's Kindness and Severity"

<sup>22</sup>Behold, therefore, [the] **kindness** and severity of God; indeed, having fallen upon those, severity; however, toward you, [the] **kindness** of God, if you remain in His **kindness**; otherwise, you also will be cut off.

Paul reveals the dominate note by referring to God's "**kindness**" three times! You certainly know that "**kindness**" is sorely lacking among humanity; however, it is abundant with God Almighty (2:4)! The basis by which anyone exists in the Olive Tree, whether natural branches (Jews); or those grafted in (Gentiles); is solely based upon God's gracious "**kindness**" received and sustained in faith (11:20).



# Romans

## 11:20-24



### SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - "God's Kindness and Severity"

<sup>22</sup>Behold, therefore, [the] kindness and **severity** of God; indeed, having fallen upon those, **severity**; however, toward you, [the] kindness of God, if you remain in His kindness; otherwise, you also will be cut off.

Apart from the life-giving and nourishing sap which God provides in Christ, there is only "**severity**." This Greek term refers to legal or judicial strictness or even pitiless punishment. This use does resonate well with Paul's previous legal argument about the wrath of God in 1:18–3:20. All people have turned away from God and, therefore, apart from divine intervention are rightly and righteously condemned under His divine judgment.

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<sup>22</sup>Behold, therefore, [the] **kindness** and **severity** of God; indeed, having fallen upon those, **severity**; however, toward you, [the] **kindness** of God, if you remain in His **kindness**; otherwise, you also will be cut off.

God's choosing of the Israelites, however, brought them under His kindness and grace! Those who tripped and stumbled over the Stone, in whom they were intended to believe, fell (9:32-33; 11:11), this is, they fell into unbelief (10:16; 11:20). Without faith in the Lord's "**kindness**," what results will be His "**severity!**"



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## 11:20-24



### SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - "God's Kindness and Severity"

<sup>22</sup>Behold, therefore, [the] kindness and severity of God; indeed, having fallen upon those, severity; however, toward you, [the] kindness of God, if you **remain** in His kindness; otherwise, you also will be cut off.

Most people do understand that branches do not actively "*persist*" in order to stay in place in a tree. Paul's use a passive compound verb (ἐπιμένης) "**remain**" "*persevere*" fits his Olive Tree analogy very well. Our Lord Jesus uses the same verb, though St. John uses the simple form of "*remain*" or "*abide*" (μένει), in his Gospel (15:4-10). So the thought is: as long as the branch (you) **remain** where God has placed you, this is in faith; you will reside within God's kindness along with the patriarchs (cf. v.11. 28).

# Romans

## 11:20-24



### SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - "God's Kindness and Severity"

***<sup>22</sup>Behold, therefore, [the] kindness and severity of God; indeed, having fallen upon those, severity; however, toward you, [the] kindness of God, if you remain in His kindness; otherwise, you also will be cut off.***

Therefore, be comforted to know that God's expressed will is that you **"remain"** in faith and that the Word of Christ (10:17) preserves you in faith with your Lord Jesus securing your place in His Tree (cf. see Luther's explanation of the Second Article of the Creed)!

However, in human terms, you can get yourself removed; you will be **"cut off"** (ἐκκοπήση) from the Tree of Christ if you do not continue to stand firm in faith. Then, your Lord, who is just and righteous, will remove you; He will not **"spare"** you (vv.20, 21); you'll be cut out and face His just and righteous severity (v.22).



# Romans

## 11:20-24



SECTION II:  
PAUL'S  
ANALOGIES -  
*"God's Persistent  
Power to Save!"*

***23Now, even they, if they continue not in unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able again to graft in them.***

The grace and mercy of God is clearly seen in this verse as St. Paul explains by saying that God's kindness is constantly exerting itself, so that those who are cut off, fallen due to unbelief, are not beyond recovery (forgiveness) in this life. Paul is speaking most emphatically about the "*some*" of Israel, the unbelieving Jews who resisted, and continue to resist, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

# Romans

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### SECTION II:

### PAUL'S

### ANALOGIES -

*"God's Persistent  
Power to Save!"*

***23Now, even they, if they continue not in unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able again to graft in them.***

Paul is reinforcing the significance of faith and unbelief. The *“Word of Christ”* (10:17) has been sent out (has been and still is being proclaimed) and heard. Faith come by *“hearing,”* yet not all who hear believe. However, God has not rejected His people, even though they are unpersuaded and contradicting, as His hands are stretched out to them (10:21). If His people do not persist in their unbelief, but are brought back to faith (in repentance), by the Word of Christ, Paul affirms with a very important verb (ἐνκεντριοθήσεται) *“[they] will be grafted in.”* In the NT, this verb always refers to God combining His *two* redeemed ethnic groups (OT, NT believers) *into* one people.



# Romans

## 11:20-24



SECTION II:  
PAUL'S  
ANALOGIES -  
*"A Natural  
Return!"*

***24For if you, contrary to nature according to a wild olive tree were cut off, and, contrary to nature, were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more these, who [are] according to nature, will be grafted into their own olive tree.***

**Paul continues his metaphor of the Olive Tree with an extensive probing thought for Gentiles to ponder in this verse. So let's "scrutinize" this verse by "breaking it" into two parts:**

# Romans

## 11:20-24



### SECTION II: PAUL'S ANALOGIES - “A Natural Return!”

***24For if you, contrary to nature according to a wild olive tree were cut off, and, contrary to nature, were grafted into a cultivated olive tree...,***

1. St. Paul asserts a positive promise! Every Gentile (you) were once separated from God's people (Olive Tree) and under the severity of His divine wrath (cf. Eph 2:3, 11-12). Yet now, contrary to nature and all expectations, “*you*” were “*grafted into*” His “*cultivated olive tree.*”

Now, by faith, you receive the nourishing “sap” of God's extraordinary “kindness,” which He bestowed upon the patriarchs and grants to believing Israelites through the “*root.*” As “*you,*” a Gentile, “*remain*” in faith, God now calls you “*...fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God*” (Eph 2:19); with all its attendant blessings!



# Romans

## 11:20-24

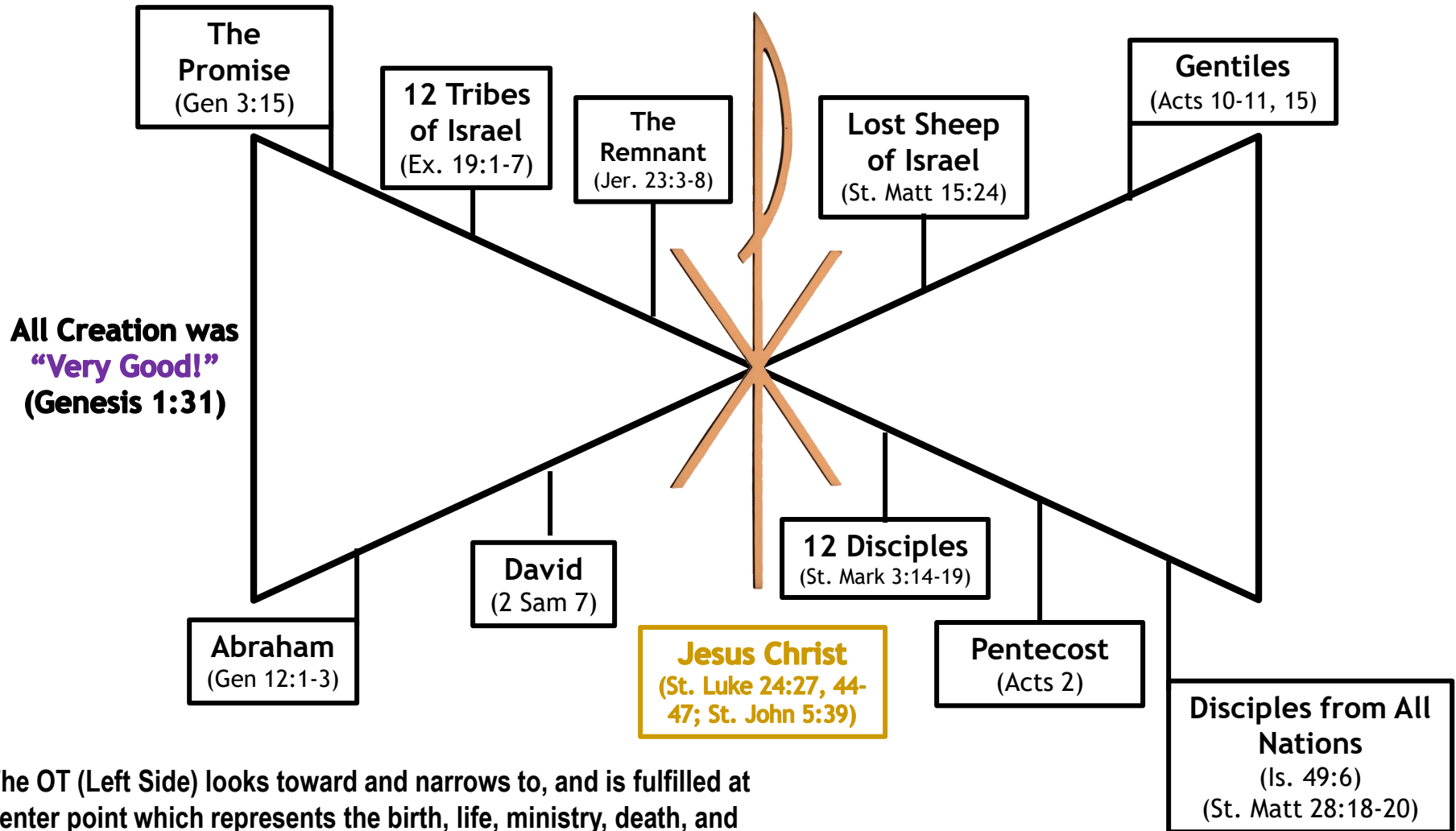


SECTION II:  
PAUL'S  
ANALOGIES -  
*"A Natural  
Return!"*

<sup>24</sup>"...how much more these, who [are] according to nature, will be grafted into *their own olive tree*.

2). Paul refers to the branches which were born and grew up as part of the cultivated Olive Tree "*according to nature*," but have now been broken off by God due to their unbelief. Yes, they are currently fallen from the Tree, but these people have not fallen into unbelief in such a way as to make their ultimate conversion impossible for God! He is certainly willing and powerfully able to return them to what is, in fact, "*their own Olive Tree*;" if they do not "*remain*" in unbelief.

# THE BOW-TIE DIAGRAM<sup>1</sup>



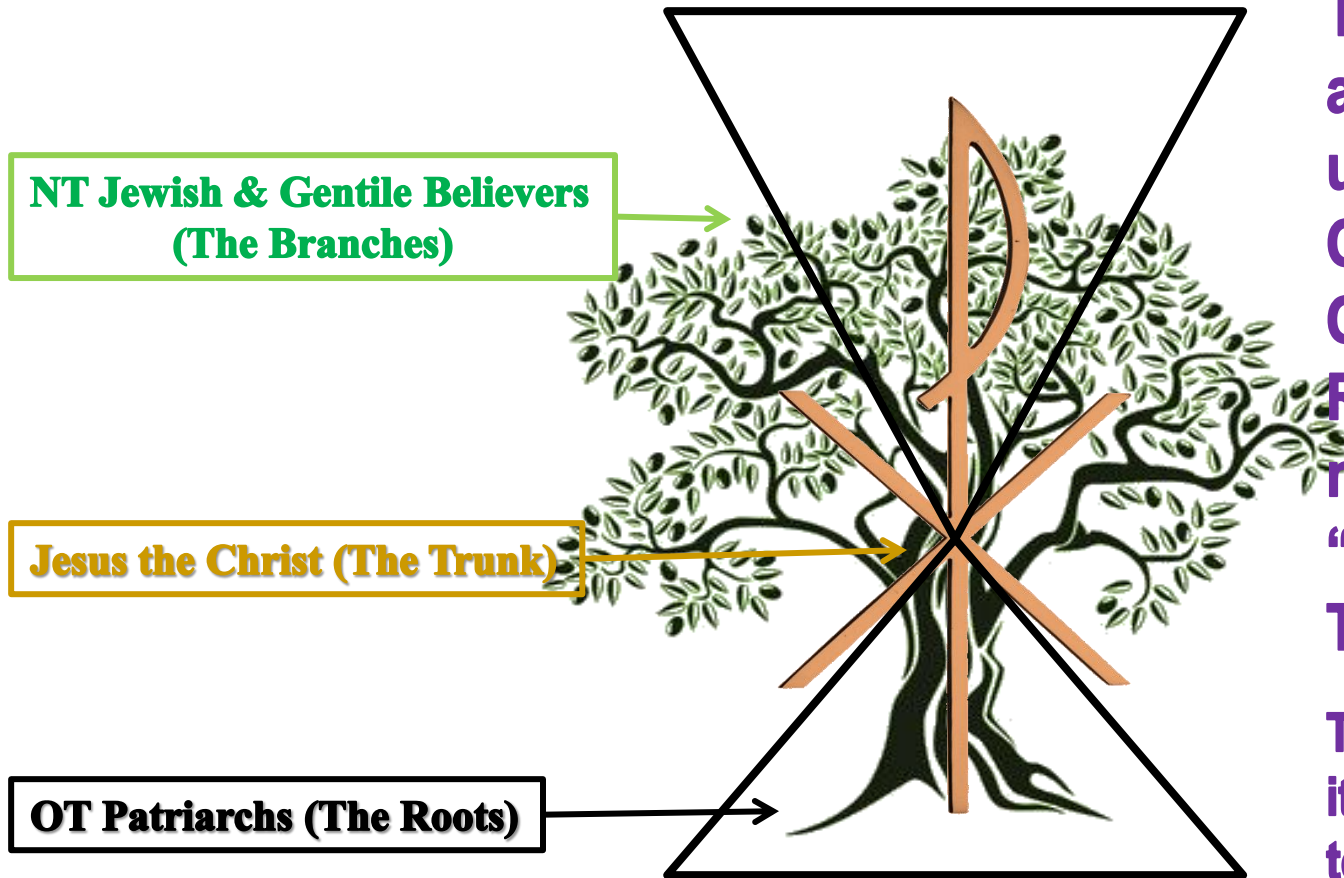
The OT (Left Side) looks toward and narrows to, and is fulfilled at center point which represents the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah/Christ!

The NT (Right Side) represents all that flows from Jesus, initially to the Twelve, to the people of Israel, and then to all the world!

<sup>1</sup>This diagram and the Olive Tree Analogy following this slide is adapted from: Middendorf, Michael. *Romans*, 9-16. Concordia Commentary, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016, p.1131.



# GOD'S ONE OLIVE TREE



This is the Olive Tree analogy that St. Paul uses to depict God's One Tree and God's One People. Clearly, Rom. 11:13-24 does not teach "Replacement Theology!"

This diagram also makes it clear that the use of the term "new Israel" is also misleading!

## "God's One People: His Israel"

# *Romans*

## *11:20-24*



THE DIVINE  
CONCLUSION

Replacement Theology is the idea that there is now a “*new Israel*” that conveys the idea of a replacement of the Jews by Gentiles. This false and misleading theology is very deceptive and is rampant in the Church, since it teaches that Israel has been replaced as the people of God.

Here are the issues:



# Romans

## 11:20-24



THE DIVINE  
CONCLUSION

1. *“The Jews killed Jesus.”* This is actually not true, literally. Taking a clear look at Holy Scripture, we see that the Jewish leaders *“turned Jesus over to the Roman authority,”* who then executed Jesus (St. Matthew 27:26-31; St. Mark 15:15-20; St. Luke 23:25; and St. John 19:16-23). Today, we have confessed in the Nicene Creed that Jesus *“was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.”* Since Jesus died for the sins of the world, all mankind (you and me) are equally culpable, as were the Jewish leaders; however, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus”* (8:1).

# *Romans*

## *11:20-24*



### THE DIVINE CONCLUSION

2. There are some theologians who teach that the Kingdom of God has been “*taken away from Israel*” that is, textually, incorrect. Their “proof text” is St. Matthew 21:43. However, what they do not tell you that if one, correctly, exegetes this text that the plural “*you*” from whom the Kingdom of God is taken doe NOT refer to the singular vineyard which represents Israel. Instead, verses 45-46, which they conveniently do not discuss, makes it very clear that the former tenants correspond to the Jewish religious leaders (the scribes and Pharisees) whose role of now tending the vineyard has now been ended. The vineyard, which is Israel, remains!



# *Romans*

## *11:20-24*



### THE DIVINE CONCLUSION

3. Lastly, in close reading and listening to the analogy of God's Olive Tree, you should have noticed that the Tree was NOT chopped down or replaced with a new or different tree! Any assertion to this should be roundly rejected! Remember, St. Paul, also a Jew, clearly tells us that God has NOT pushed His people away (11:1-2). Therefore, if we were to ask St. Paul to name the Olive Tree that he uses in his analogy, as with the vineyard illustration from St. Matthew, it seems to me, anyway, that he would identify the Tree as: God's One People, His Tree "Israel!"

*Next  
Week!*



*Romans*  
*11:25-36*



*RESOLUTION  
AND  
DOXOLOGY*



