



In Romans Chapter 11 Paul presents an interesting picture of how Gentile Christians (verse 13) should relate to the Jewish people, the descendants of Abraham. Romans 11:17 reveals that Gentile Christians have been "grafted in" among the "natural" branches of Abraham's descendants. We know from this chapter that the natural branches are the Jewish people of today. Paul adds that through this experience we have become partakers of the "rich root of the olive tree."

We see this same revelation in other scriptures. Galatians 3:29 says if we belong to Christ, then we are Abraham's descendants. James 2:21 refers to Abraham as our father. Romans Chapter 4 describes Abraham as the father of all who believe.

What is the significance of the Scriptures telling us that Abraham is our father if we belong to Christ? Consider the following:

- Abraham left his country, people, culture, and all he knew to be obedient to God's word. In essence, God was grafting Abraham out of the old "tree" that he was part of, to bring him into a new country whose architect and builder was God (Hebrews 11:8-10). God introduced Abraham into a new life that he did not understand where he could walk by faith with the Lord.
- Abraham knew and walked with God and expressed his faith in God's word in a very personal daily relationship with the Lord. As a father, he is an example of what we can experience today with the Lord. In Genesis 24:40 Abraham said that he "walked" before the face of God.
- Abraham's faith in God's word and promises to him grew until he knew "God is able to raise people even from the dead" in order to fulfill His word. Our faith can also grow in Christ to believe God's word over any circumstance we face.
- Perhaps the most significant meaning of being "grafted in" to Abraham and his descendants is that God established very important covenants with him and his seed. Since we are "grafted in," we now share in the fulfillment of these promises.

On our tours to Israel, we experience this "rich root of the olive tree" in several ways:

First, we cultivate a new, fresh love and excitement for God's Word. We visit the sites where many scriptures took place and we go back in time to the actual period the Scripture took place by

touring excavations at these sites with an experienced Jewish rabbi as our guide. We walk through excavations at the City of David, seeing the location of David's palace and the original Jebusite walls. We walk through thousands of years of history at the Western Wall (the Kotel). We see where the tabernacle stood at Shiloh for 360 years, walk through excavations in the north at Tel Dan and Tel Hazor, and in the south at Hebron and Beersheva where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob spent much of their life. Experience the thrill of standing on a hill overlooking the site of the actual battle between David and Goliath and feel the Scriptures come alive in a new way.

On our trips, we also interact with Jewish people in Israel with whom we have relationships. We learn about Judaism and the Jewish culture, not to judge but to receive and bless. Paul in Romans 11:18 tells us not to be arrogant toward the natural branches of the olive tree because the root supports us. We have opportunities to pray and worship with the Jewish people in their synagogues and at the Western Wall, Kotel. We experience Jewish Shabbats and learn from an observant Jewish rabbi who is our guide.

There is much we can receive from the Jewish people, including their love for the Scriptures. This love has been expressed for thousands of years as they have carefully transcribed every "jot and tittle" to preserve the Word of God. Even in times of severe persecution, when forced to flee their homes, they would carry a few possessions and the Torah scrolls. We introduce our guests to the Hebrew Scriptures and Hebrew songs so that the Jewish life and faith is a real experience.

We also experience the land of the Bible, the land God promised to the seed of Abraham over 3,000 years ago. Israel today is a land of miracles. The reborn nation of Israel itself is a miracle. Many of the battles and wars since Israel's independence can only be explained by God's providence. If you are aware of the scriptural prophecies, you can be eyewitness of how God is faithfully fulfilling His word with the cities being rebuilt, swamps being drained, and the deserts blooming.

Isaiah 2:2-3 says the nations will stream to Mount Zion to learn the ways of the Lord. We can also see the fulfillment of this prophecy as millions from all nations are coming to Israel each year. They come to learn the word of the Lord, but also to learn about medical advances, high tech, and breakthroughs in science and agriculture. Israel is one of the world leaders in patents per capita. We pray that God continues to fulfill every word he has spoken over Israel and the Jewish people.

Finally, God spoke to Abraham and his descendants that He would bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. We pray that our trips will create many ongoing blessings to Israel by building bridges of understanding between Christians and Jews. We encourage all Christians to come to Israel and experience all that the Lord is doing in His people.