

## **ARE WE BEING ROOTED OR UPROOTED?**

Over the last few decades there has been a great emphasis upon the so-called "Jewish roots" of our Christian faith. We believe this is generally a valid endeavor, and through it a great many people have been blessed and strengthened. Through this emphasis many have rediscovered the passage in Romans 11:17-21. This passage simply says that Christianity does not stand on its own. It has been a long-hidden secret of our Christian family tree, but now the secret is out. Paul makes it plain that the church is "grafted" into the Jewish olive tree and that it does not stand alone. The church is nourished by the sap of the root flowing through the tree and into its branches. So, we see that Christianity has an extremely close connection with both Judaism and Israel.

As always, with any new revelation from the word of God, there are abuses of the truth, even heresies. Heresy is quite often just a truth taken to extreme without being balanced by other biblical truths. Some of our friends sum it up this way: "If the devil can't stop us, he will take us too far." While it is commendable and biblical to pursue our Hebrew connections, we must take care not to go overboard as some are doing. They are looking to Israel alone for their roots. This is both dangerous and unbiblical.

## **MESSIAH IS THE ROOT**

The "roots movement," as we have often called it, may be an erroneous designation anyway. In all four instances of the word "root" in Romans 11, the noun is used in the singular. In addition, the use of "root" in the related passage of Romans 15:12, is also in the singular and speaks of the Messiah. Thus the movement could more properly be called the "root movement," because there is only one root, the Messiah. Perhaps it would be better and a lot less confusing if we called this whole activity the movement back to our Hebrew heritage.

The scripture makes it plain in other places that Messiah alone is the root of the tree. In Revelation 22:16, the risen Lord sends this urgent message to his people: "*I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I AM THE ROOT and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.*" [emphasis mine]. In Isaiah 11:10 we read, "*In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.*"

We should notice in this last passage that "*...the nations will rally to him...*" Isaiah pictures the Messiah of Israel as having two distinct jobs. In the servant passages, which extend from Isaiah, chapter 41 through at least chapter 61, the work of the Servant is clearly spelled out. In Isaiah 49:6, God says: "*...It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*" This is an astounding passage. It makes clear that the Messiah of Israel not only re-gathers and restores the people of Israel, but he brings light and salvation to the Gentiles as well.

Thus, the Messiah of Israel is in charge of the whole restoration program. He is the life of the land of Israel. He is its resurrection. He is the one restoring the land of Israel (Isa. 49:8). The whole land is referred to as "Immanuel's land" (Isa. 8:8). He is busy planting trees, building cities and making the desert bloom (Isa. 49:8-9). He is re-gathering Israel from all the nations and bringing them back to their land. Also as a part of his job, he is giving light to the Gentiles. It is unfortunate but true that the church has not understood the work of the Servant Messiah. We have managed to hinder his work now for many centuries.

All this makes it plain to us Gentiles that the Messiah is the one we are to seek. We must not be detracted by Israel or anything else. In Acts 28:20, Paul makes clear that the Messiah is the hope of Israel. We should not quickly cast away this hope. In Colossians 2:19, Paul uses another metaphor, instructing us that Christ is the Head of the body and he urges us to hold fast to the Head.

## **ABUSING THE TREE**

While it is commendable for Christians to better understand their Hebrew heritage, it is important that this heritage not be abused. Unfortunately, it is now obvious that some are abusing it. Already there are numerous Gentile believers who are rushing to become Jews, or rather pseudo-Jews. Some Gentile Christians are on the verge of idolatry concerning this. These today are leaving the Christian walk and adopting Judaism in matters of worship, of foods, of attire, etc. It has become a god to them. It is a compulsion.

Knowledge of the Jewish people is certainly important, and we strongly encourage this knowledge. We teach and encourage Christians everywhere to love and appreciate the Jewish people. But when Gentile Christians attempt to become Jews, they lose their identity in Christ and turn loose of the Head. They hinder the final working out of God's plan (Eph. 2:15-16). It is likely that they may also become disgusting to the Jews. Paul puts it bluntly in Galatians 5:4: "*You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.*"

Since we are once more facing some of the difficult problems of relationships that were faced in the first-century church, it might be well for us to re-read the book of Galatians. In this little book there are clear principles laid down that will help guide us in our relationships with Judaism. We certainly need to balance these newly discovered doctrines with all the other doctrines in the Bible.

Today some are also on the verge of idolatry concerning the nation of Israel. We might ask ourselves the question, "Are we talking more about Israel than we are about God?" People tend to talk about their gods. We must remember that the Lord is a "*jealous God*" (Exo. 20:5). He will not tolerate a divided loyalty, even if that division has resulted because of his land or his people.

### **HOLDING ON TO THE ROOT**

Although the Bible may never specifically compare Jesus to the olive tree, the clear implication is there by the fact that he is the root. We know from another related picture that he is the vine. In John 15:5 we read, "*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*" In this same passage, Paul gives urgent warnings about turning loose of the vine.

The Apostle Paul gives us end-day Christians this sound advice in Colossians 2:6-10: "*So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ROOTED [emphasis mine] and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.*"

- Jim Gerrish