

ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

In all wisdom and prudence making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him the plan for the fullness of the times

**TO HEAD UP THE ALL THINGS IN THE CHRIST,
the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, in Him...**

(Ephesians 1:8b-10)

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Olive Tree in Scripture

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The olive tree is a fascinating and complex subject. However, as I have tried to research its meaning in Scripture, I have not discovered any extensive commentary on it that I found helpful. With this in mind, I decided to simply go through Scripture looking at the main references to the olive tree and its parts. What follows is a result of this study.

Before looking at Scripture, perhaps it would be good to consider the natural or physical olive tree, for its very nature and character give us an indication of its spiritual significance.

The Natural Olive Tree

The olive tree is an evergreen tree that is native to the coastal areas of the eastern Mediterranean and adjoining coastal areas of southeastern Europe, western Asia, and northern Africa. It grows best in the **direct sun**, and is suited for **rocky** calcareous subsoil. Its trunk is knotty and gnarled; its bark is smooth and ash colored; its leaves are leathery and silvery green, suggestive of "**tenacious strength**"; its wood is fine grained, solid and yellowish; its flower is feathery white; and it produces an edible fruit (the olive).

It is **very hardy** due to its **drought, disease, and fire resistance**. This is, in large part, due to its extensive and **robust root system** that is capable of regenerating itself even if the trunk is destroyed by fire. Consequently, it can and does **live a very long time**. Some individual olive trees in the Mediterranean area have been estimated to be **2,000 years of age**; most are hundreds of years of age.

It is generally seen as a symbol of **peace** but can also be a symbol of wisdom, glory, fertility, power, and pureness. It is also associated with the color **green**, which signifies **life**.

It should be obvious that several of the characteristics of the natural olive tree have very significant spiritual meaning. Clearly, the Lord created the olive tree this way and then used its characteristics to reveal or symbolize spiritual truths or principles.

In a metaphorical and symbolic sense, the olive tree is portrayed as one of the most important trees in Scripture. The only tree that exceeds the olive tree is the Tree of Life; however, in some respects, they are very similar.

The Challenge

As we begin, the greatest challenge faced in putting this together was trying to stay on subject because there are many side issues that relate to the olive tree and, without an understanding of these, some of the spiritual significance of the olive tree might be missed or misunderstood. For example, much misunderstanding comes in when one fails to make a distinction between the house of Israel and the house of Judah, or between the Israelite and the Jew. So, space is spent on explaining the differences, especially in light of Romans 11 where Paul referred to the cultivated and the wild olive trees and branches.

To this end, as much detail as possible has been incorporated without overloading this study with side eddies. Lord willing, in the future, some of the topics requiring further explanation will be addressed in subsequent studies.

So, let us turn to God's word, as presented in twelve major sets of Scripture, to see what we can glean about the olive tree itself, along with its leaves, oil, and wood.

1. Olive Leaf – New Life, New Beginning

The **law of first mention** generally sets the meaning of a word or concept as it is used throughout Scripture that follows. In the case of the olive tree, the olive leaf first came into view with Noah as he was on the ark waiting for the water to recede.

(10) So he waited yet another seven days; and again he sent out the dove from the ark. (11) The dove came to him toward evening, and behold, in her beak was a freshly picked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the water was abated from the earth. (Genesis 8:10-11 NASB)

Presumably, Noah had waited for 7 days and on the 8th day he released the dove and she came back that evening.

The number **7** signifies the **completion of that which is in view** or **divine perfection**. It also speaks of the advancement of the Kingdom of God when, in the 7th day, **the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ** (Revelation 11:15) will take root among the nations of our present earth and rule and reign over the nations for 1,000 years in what is called the **Lord's Day** or the **Day of Christ**.

The number **8** signifies **new birth, resurrection life, new life, new beginning, or new creation**. It also speaks of the further advancement of the Kingdom of God when a new heaven and a new earth replace the old in **God's Day** as God makes all things new (Revelation 21).

By bringing a freshly picked olive leaf to Noah, the dove was signifying that there was new life growing on earth. The Word of God especially makes it clear that this leaf was no dead leaf floating on the surface someplace. No; it was freshly picked.

The hardy olive tree lived up to its reputation for regeneration even if its trunk and branches are destroyed. Neither rain, nor hail, nor wind can destroy God's choice tree. Tenacious it is!

Thus, at the outset of Scripture, the olive tree is established as the symbol for new life or freshness or a fresh beginning, which not only speaks of new life but of **renewal** or **revival**. Either way, it is clear that the olive tree, especially its leaf, is most associated with life.

Also, it is quite significant that the dove, not some other bird, delivered the olive leaf, for the dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. We see this most clearly in the baptism of Jesus.

And John witnessed, saying, I have seen the Spirit coming down as a dove out of Heaven, and He abode on Him. (John 1:32 LITV; also Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22)

So, the dove returning to Noah with an olive leaf in its beak signified new life on earth. We could say that she was bringing life to Noah and his family and all the animals on the ark. As the deliverer of this sign of life, the dove herself signified the Holy Spirit that gives life. This is confirmed by Jesus' own words.

It is the Spirit that gives life. The flesh does not profit, nothing! The Words which I speak to you are spirit and are life. (John 6:63 LITV)

The dove, a symbol of the Spirit of God, on the 8th day, gave Noah a sign of new or regenerated life on earth, starting with the olive tree, which pointed to all the nations on earth eventually being blessed in and by the olive tree.

2. Olive Oil – Holy and Anointed

The next mention of the olive tree is in reference to its oil.

(23) "Take also for yourself the finest of spices: of flowing myrrh five hundred shekels, and of fragrant cinnamon half as much, two hundred and fifty, and of fragrant cane two hundred and fifty, (24) and of cassia five hundred, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and of olive oil a hin. (25) "You shall make of these a holy anointing oil, a perfume mixture, the work of a perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil. (Exodus 30:23-25 NASB)

Moses was commanded to take fine spices and mix them in olive oil to make holy anointing oil for consecrating the Tent of Meeting and the Ark of the Covenant. Since the oil from the fruit of the tree was used to consecrate the Tabernacle, the tree itself must also be consecrated or holy, that is, set apart unto the Lord. **If the root is holy, so also the branches** (Romans 11:16), and we could add, so is everything that comes out from the root.

In the ancient, natural realm, olive oil had a wide application of uses that included food and medicine for the body, and fuel for lamps.

In the spirit realm, olive oil symbolizes the anointing of the Holy Spirit, both of Christ and His people. Even the beating or crushing of the olive fruit to produce the oil has spiritual meaning, for Christ Himself was crushed on the Cross so that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on His Church after His ascension back to His Father in heaven.

Consider how the oil is explained in the *Bible Encyclopedia and Dictionary* by A.R. Fausset (Zondervan Publishing House; page 523: Oil).

"Its **three principal uses among the Hebrews** were: (1) To **anoint the body** so as to mollify the skin, heal injuries, and strengthen muscles (Psalm 104:15; 109:18; 141:5; Isaiah 1:6; Luke 10:34; 2 Chronicles 28:15; Mark 6:13; James 5:14. (2) As we use butter, **as food** (Numbers 11:8; 1 Kings 17:12; 1 Chronicles 12:40; Ezekiel 16:13, 19; Hosea 2:5). (3) To **burn in lamps** (Exodus 25:6; Matthew 25:3). **Type of the Holy Spirit's unction**; (2 Corinthians 1:21; 1 John 2:20, 27) **and illumination** (Zechariah 4:11, 12)."

"**The supply of grace comes not from a dead reservoir of oil, but through living "olive trees."** Ordinances and ministers are channels, not the grace itself; Zechariah 4:14, "anointed one." In Hebrew, they are "sons of oil." Isaiah 5:1 reads "very fruitful hill," but in Hebrew it means "honor of the son of oil."

"**The Lord Jesus has the fullness of grace from double olive trees of the Holy Spirit, so as to be at once our priest and king**; He is the tree, ministers the branches, "emptying the golden oil out of themselves" for the supply of the church and to the glory of the Author of grace."

"In the **sanctuary, oil** served the three purposes: (1) **anointing the priests and holy things**, (2) as **food in the bloodless offerings**, (3) it **kept alive the lights in "the pure candlestick"; "the lamp of God" (1 Samuel 3:3) in the holy place.**"

"**Messiah is the Antitype "anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows** (Hebrews 1:9; Psalm 45:7); not only above us, the adopted members of God's family, but above the angels, partakers with Him, though infinitely His inferiors, in the holiness and joys of heaven. His "anointing" with "the oil of exulting joy" took place not at His baptism when He began His ministry for us, but at His triumphant completion of His work, at His ascension (Ephesians 4:8; Psalm 68:18), when **He obtained the Holy Spirit without measure** (John 3:34), **to impart to us in measure.**"

"The oil of gladness shall be in the fullest sense His "in the day of espousals, in the day of the gladness of His heart" (Song of Solomon 3:11; Revelation 19:7). Guests were anointed with oil at feasts; so He anoints us (Psalm 23:5). The offering of oil on the altar was the offerer's acknowledgment that all his spiritual gifts were from Jehovah."

"The "beaten oil" for the sanctuary light was made from olives bruised in a mortar. So Messiahs bruising preceded His pouring out of the Spirit on us (Exodus 25:6; 27:20). The olives were sometimes "trodden" (Micah 6:15), or "pressed" in a "press," making the vats overthrow (Joel 2:24; 3:13; Haggai 2:16)."

"Meat offerings were mingled or anointed with oil (Leviticus 7:10, 12); but the sin offering and the offering of jealousy were without oil (Leviticus 7:11; Numbers 5:15). The oil indicated "gladness"; its absence sorrow and humiliation (Isaiah 61:3; Joel 2:19; Psalm 45:7)."

3. Olive Oil – Good of the Land

Next, Moses and the sons of Israel were encouraged to have the faith to enter the Promised Land of Canaan, for it was a good land.

(7) "For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; (8) a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey.... (Deuteronomy 8:7-8 NASB)

Part of the good of the land was the fact that it was a land of olive oil, which means it had an abundance of olive trees. It becomes clear that all the spiritual truths regarding the olive tree are manifested and experienced in the good land, which under the New Covenant is not about a piece of real estate on earth but about receiving an immortal body in the image of the Son of God, filled with the Spirit of God and shining brightly with the glory (light) of God.

The hope of mankind is to go from the experience of **Passover** (applying the blood to one's heart; **justification** by faith), to **Pentecost** (receiving an earnest of the Spirit; **sanctification**), and finally, to **Tabernacles** (receiving an immortal, celestial, spiritual body in the image of Christ; **glorification** as a son of God in the Father's kingdom (Matthew 13:38, 43; Revelation 21:7). This is a tremendous subject, but we must leave it for another study.

Much later, the king of Assyria tried to entice Judah to surrender to him by undermining Hezekiah by lying to the people about their true intentions. However, in his lie, the king's messenger did state a truth when he told them the olive tree was a sign of life not death.

(31) 'Do not listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria, "Make your peace with me and come out to me, and eat each of his vine and each of his fig tree and drink each of the waters of his own cistern, (32) until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey, that you may live and not die." (2 Kings 18:31-32 NASB)

As stated earlier, a case could be made for the olive tree being closely aligned with the **Tree of Life**. Both speak of life and both provide fruit for healing and, as such, both are conduits of life to all who partake of the oil pressed from its fruit, which signifies the Spirit of God that gives life, and both are essential blessings to all the nations.

4. Olive Wood – Doors of the Inner Sanctuary

Next, when Solomon built the house of the Lord, he used olive wood for the doors to the inner sanctuary or the **Most Holy Place**. He then had cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers carved into the wood and had it overlaid with gold.

(31) For the entrance of the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood, the lintel and five-sided doorposts. (32) So he made two doors of olive wood, and he carved on them carvings of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold; and he spread the gold

on the cherubim and on the palm trees. (33) So also he made for the entrance of the nave four-sided doorposts of olive wood (34) and two doors of cypress wood; the two leaves of the one door turned on pivots, and the two leaves of the other door turned on pivots. (35) He carved on it cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers; and he overlaid them with gold evenly applied on the engraved work. (1 Kings 6:31-35 NASB)

It is significant that the cherubim were carved into olive wood.

The cherubim were stationed in the Garden of Eden to guard the **Tree of Life** (Genesis 3:24). They covered the Mercy Seat that was placed in the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:20). The Lord dwelled between them (Exodus 25:22). They were associated with the brightness of the glory of the Lord (Ezekiel 1). They were in the midst of and around the Throne and Glory of God (Revelation 4:6), constantly joining in with other living creatures of the heavenly host in the adoration of God. They are depicted as in perpetual motion, continually crying: "**Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.**"

Obviously, there is much associated with the cherubim; but, in reference to the olive tree, we see life, not only in the Garden of Eden but also in the Most Holy Place, at the Mercy Seat, and especially around the Throne of Glory. Also, the fact that the olive wood was overlaid with gold signifies the very life of the Lord; divine life of the One who is the Door and the Life.

So, olive wood symbolizes **Christ the Door and the Life**. Only through Him does anyone enter into **eonian** and **immortal life** and come into the **presence of God**, which is symbolized by the **Most Holy Place**. And, we might add, all of this speaks of entering into the **Kingdom of God**.

5. Olive Plants – Children Born of the Olive Tree

(1) A Song of Ascents. How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways. (2) When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, you will be happy and it will be well with you. (3) Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house, your children like olive plants around your table. (4) Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. (5) The LORD bless you from Zion, and may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life. (6) Indeed, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel! (Psalm 128:1-6 NASB)

Those who fear the Lord and walk in His ways are likened to olive trees that bear children likened to olive plants or sucklings, not full-grown trees. In other words, one who is blessed of the Lord is fruitful. When Elohim created Adam from the soil of the earth and fashioned Eve from his rib, He blessed them to be fruitful and multiply; a blessing that was repeated to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Perhaps, we could say that this was the genesis of the olive tree with Adam and Eve being types. They were to partake of the Tree of Life and be fruitful in bringing forth olive plants, progeny in their own image (the image of God) prior to their fall.

Thus, a man who fears the Lord is an olive tree, and he will be blessed with olive plant children, destined to grow into trees bearing much fruit as they live to a ripe old age.

But there is one more, perhaps greater, application dealing with the kingdom. Speaking to the bad figs of Judah that would be broken off the cultivated olive tree, Jesus said: **"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it"** (Matthew 21:43 NASB). The fruit He was and is looking for is the fruit of the Spirit, such as **righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit** (Romans 14:17), which is the character of the Kingdom of God.

6. Olive Tree – Choicest of the Trees

Now, in one of the oldest parables in Scripture, as recorded in Judges, **nations are symbolized as trees**. In the parable, the olive tree or olive nation is the most prominent since the other trees turn to it first.

(8) "Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!' (9) "But the olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?'" (Judges 9:8-9 NASB)

Symbolically, the olive tree nation is characterized by fatness, which signifies the choicest of all that can and should be offered to the Lord. Thus, as a nation, the olive tree signifies the choicest of nations.

The choicest are expressed many ways, for example, the fatness of the earth, the fat [firstfruits] of the wheat, and the fat of the mighty (Genesis 28:28; Deuteronomy 32:14 [KJV]; Numbers 18:12 [footnote: literally *fat*]; 2 Samuel 1:22).

Further, the fat was closely associated with the blood in sacrifices, as it was considered the richest part and special to God (Leviticus 3:16, 17). Given this, the olive tree identifies with the ultimate sacrifice of the Son of God on the Cross of Calvary for the sin of the world.

Carrying this over to the olive nation, we could say that the olive tree nation is one that has been pressed in the press (trials, suffering) of life to produce the anointing oil of Christ to light the world with **the Light of the World. If indeed we suffer with Him, we may also be glorified with Him** (Romans 8:17).

7. Green Olive Tree – House of Israel in Covenant Relationship

As we move through Scripture and build upon the significance of the olive tree, we come to two references to the *green* olive tree, which add another dimension to its meaning.

First, David wrote of being a green olive tree in the house of the Lord, which refers to constantly dwelling in the presence of the Lord, which can only be done *in* spirit, through the Holy Spirit.

(6) The righteous will see and fear, and will laugh at him, saying, (7) "Behold, the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and was strong in his evil desire." (8) But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the

lovingkindness of God forever and ever. (9) I will give You thanks forever, because You have done it, and I will wait on Your name, for it is good, in the presence of Your godly ones. (Psalm 52:6-9 NASB)

David was a man according to the heart of God, who did God's will (1 Samuel 13:14; Psalm 89:20; Acts 13:22). The Lord spoke of the king of Israel: "**My servant David who kept My commandments, and who walked after Me with all his heart, to do only that which is right in My eyes**" (1 Kings 14:8 LITV).

Without any doubt, it could be said of David the king of Israel that he had an intimate, heart-to-heart covenant relationship with the Lord, and this relationship is likened to a green olive tree in the House of God, which is synonymous with entering into the Kingdom of God.

Second, in bringing judgment upon the house of Israel and the house of Judah, the Lord reminded **the whole house of Israel** (all 12 tribes of Judah and Israel) that He gave them the name *green olive tree*. This was not a Jewish tree; it was **an Israelite tree**.

The LORD called your name, "A green olive tree, beautiful in fruit and form"; with the noise of a great tumult He has kindled fire on it, and its branches are worthless. (Jeremiah 11:16 NASB)

In other words, the Lord named them a green olive tree or, we could say, an olive nation. When the nation remained in **covenant relationship** with the Lord as **His kingdom nation**, they were beautiful in fruit and form. However, Israel broke that covenant, and they lost their beauty and identity as a green olive tree. The restoration of Israel began with the Cross and is now known as the **Church of God, the Israel of God**. Hosea prophesied that **his beauty will be like the olive tree** (Hosea 14:6).

When the sons of Israel came out of Egypt and arrived at Mount Sinai in Arabia, Moses went up on the mountain and the Lord told him to warn the sons of Israel.

(5) 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; (6) and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." (Exodus 19:5-6 NASB)

Unfortunately, after the glory and peaceful years of Solomon kingdom when the tribes were split into Israel (northern kingdom of 10 tribes) and Judah (southern kingdom of 2 tribes plus the Levites), they went after other gods and broke God's covenant.

"They have turned back to the iniquities of their ancestors who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers." (Jeremiah 11:10 NASB)

It is in this context that the Lord told them that they had been called a green olive tree. However, in breaking the covenant with God, their branches became worthless, except for use as kindling wood for a fire, metaphorically speaking. They were no longer a kingdom of priests

and a holy nation. **Israel** was taken captive by the **Assyrians** in **745-721 BC** and scattered among the nations, losing their national identity as the house of Israel; a loss that exists to this day. **Judah** was taken captive by the **Babylonians** in **604-534 BC**; however, a remnant returned to Jerusalem as **the fig tree of Judah**, which was pruned of the bad figs from **33-73 AD** to become the good fig tree of the true Church (Jeremiah 24; Matthew 21:19-21, 43; 24:32; Luke 13:6-7; 21:29; John 15:1-11) and to continue on as the cultivated olive tree.

In these two green olive tree citations we see two extremes, both of which refer to a covenant relationship with the Lord and entering into His kingdom; one was kept and blessed, the other was broken and cursed. As we will see, the latter was broken off from the cultivated olive tree. Now, let us consider Nehemiah 8:15 followed by Romans 11, for they both refer to two types of olive branches.

8. Olive and Wild Olive Branches – Prophetic Sign of Tabernacles

When Nehemiah and a remnant of Judah returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple (**534-515 BC**), Ezra the scribe was asked to bring forth the book of the Law of Moses which the Lord had given Israel. On the first day of the seventh month the Law began to be read to the people. On the second day they found written in the words of the Law that in the seventh month they were to live in booths, celebrating the **Feast of Booths** or **Tabernacles** (Nehemiah 8:1-2, 14) as a sign of coming out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land.

So they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of other leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written." (Nehemiah 8:15 NASB)

Olive branches weren't the only branches used to make the booths, for the myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees were included; however, the olive tree was the only one identified with **two types of branches**, one was simply called *olive branches* and the other *wild olive branches*.

It appears that the olive branches came from the domesticated or, as Paul called them (Romans 11:17, 24), cultivated olive trees, and the wild olive branches came from trees that appear in the wild, not in the cultivated orchards. The NASB uses the term *wild olive branches* but other translations refer to them as *branches from the oil trees*, *branches from beautiful wood*, *pine branches*, or ***branches of field olives***.

As seen in the next section, the field olives most accurately and prophetically describe the wild olives that began to be grafted into the Lord's cultivated olive tree, especially after Calvary, nearly 600 years after Nehemiah.

However, we must not lose sight of the prophetic significance of the relationship between the two types of olive branches and Tabernacles. The fact that Nehemiah referred to cultivated and wild olive branches in reference to Tabernacles is quite significant, for it speaks of God bringing both together in the experience of Tabernacles that is the next age.

As a reminder, for all who are under the **New Covenant** (i.e., Christians), **Tabernacles** is about **sonship** and coming into a new dwelling out of heaven or, as Paul wrote, **to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven** (out of, not in heaven), **so that what is mortal will be swallowed up in life** (2 Corinthians 5:2, 4). Tabernacles is about **putting off mortality** and **putting on immortality** (1 Corinthians 15:53). It is not about a piece of real estate on earth. This is also a tremendous topic that requires further study.

On one level, Nehemiah's prophetic olive branches speak of the **one new man** that came about when Christ broke down the dividing wall between the **commonwealth of Israel** and **all the nations [ethnos]** on earth (Ephesians 2:11-22). On another level, it speaks of **a remnant of grace** from the Israelites that were saved and continued on as the cultivated olive tree.

And yet, on another level, it speaks of **the lost sheep of the house of Israel** as wild olive branches in the field of the world grafted back into the cultivated olive tree as well as **all the nations** ultimately being grafted into the cultivated olive tree. All are destined to come under the **New Covenant**, all in relationship to the rich root of the cultivated olive tree, which is Christ.

9. Cultivated and Wild Olive Trees – Pruning and Grafting

Paul picked up Nehemiah's theme of the olive branches and wild olive branches in his epistle to the Romans in which he referred to a **remnant of grace** being saved from among his fellow Israelites, with the majority broken off [pruned] from the cultivated olive tree.

(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... (24) 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? (Romans 11:17, 24 NASB)

Interestingly, Paul did not explain the meaning of the cultivated olive tree, as if his readers understood what it meant, and yet, it is not specifically explained in Scripture either. For that understanding, we must study all references to the olive tree, as is being done in this study.

Please understand that what follows is not intended to be an in-depth study of Romans 11, but simply a continuation of the study of the olive tree. However, out of necessity, this section has many parts to it (broken into **bold italic** subheadings with major points numbered) and, therefore, is rather long.

Abrahamic Covenant

Paul started chapter 11 with a reminder that he was an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, which places his emphasis on a national level, not necessarily an individual one. In this regard, it is possible that the root of the olive tree of Romans 11 signifies the **Abrahamic Covenant**, meaning it signifies God's covenant to bless all the nations through Abraham the father of nations. God's plan to achieve His purpose of all in all is to bless all the nations.

(1) Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; (2) and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; (3) and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Genesis 12:1-3 NASB)

(2) "I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly." (3) Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, (4) "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations. (5) "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. (6) "I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you." (Genesis 17:2-6 NASB)

(17) The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, (18) since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?" (Genesis 18:17-18 NASB)

A full discussion of this covenant blessing is beyond the scope of this article; however, it is important to keep this in mind as we consider Paul's presentation of the olive tree. As presented in the following, I see both a national and an individual component to the tree. The individual component takes nothing away from the Abrahamic Covenant; it enhances it.

Paul's fellow kinsmen, Israel

Paul's focus was clearly on the branches in reference to his fellow countrymen, genealogical Israelites, being broken off (pruned) and grafted back in as branches of the cultivated olive tree. By extension, Paul also included in this grafting and pruning all believers from among the nations (wild olive), including the lost sheep of the house of Israel that had been scattered among the nations (wild olive).

It is without question that in using the term *Israelites*, Paul meant *genealogical* Israelites, his kinsmen according to the flesh "at the present time," meaning in Paul's day. Today, even Paul would be hard pressed to identify true Israelites according to the flesh.

(9:3) For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh (4) who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises... (10:1) Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. (Romans 9:3-4; 10:1 NASB)

(1) I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. (2) God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? (3) "Lord, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, THEY HAVE TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY ARE SEEKING MY LIFE." (4) But what is the divine response to him? "I HAVE KEPT for Myself SEVEN THOUSAND

MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL." (5) In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice [election of grace]. (Romans 11:1-5 NASB)

In using the term *Israelites*, Paul was referring to the **12 tribes of the ancient and United Kingdom of Israel**. Some believe he was referring to the **10 tribes of the house of Israel that lost their national identity** when they were taken captive by the Assyrians, never to return to their land as a nation. However, Paul identified himself as an Israelite of the nation of Israel and a Benjamite (Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5), meaning Benjamin was an Israelite. I believe that it is sound to conclude that **Paul was not referring exclusively to the Jews** who made up the southern kingdom of Judah and were comprised of Judah, Benjamin, and many of the Levites, except when they were counted as one of the 12 tribes of Israel. It is interesting that Paul stated: **To the Jews I became as a Jew** (1 Corinthians 9:20), as if being an Israelite was the basis of his identity. At any rate, as you read what follows, think of Israelites and not Jews.

But let us be very clear on one point: Although he referred to genealogical Israelites, Paul never asserted that, just because the Israelites according to the flesh received the promises, they were automatically under the New Covenant or, for that matter, since they had been incorporated as a kingdom under the Old Covenant that this gave them the right to remain under the old that was made obsolete (Hebrews 8:13). He knew the flesh profits nothing and that one is not saved by the flesh or the works of the law (e.g., John 1:12-13; 6:63; Romans 3:10-11, 28; 9:8; 2 Corinthians 5:16). What he also knew was that, in his day, God had saved a remnant of grace from among the Israelites that came from the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he was proof as one of them.

Meaning of the Cultivated and Wild Olive Branches

Of course, there is much spiritual truth in Romans 9-11, but this study is limited to the olive tree and, in this case, primarily the branches of the cultivated and wild olive trees. The question is: What did Paul mean by these two trees and their branches?

First, it is quite clear that, according to Paul, the *branches* of the cultivated olive tree signify Israelites who had been justified by grace through faith in his day. In other words, they believed on the Lord Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah and Savior of the world. In Paul's day, they formed **the remnant of grace**. But let us be abundantly clear that they were a remnant of grace, not because of their flesh (descendants of Isaac [Romans 9:7]), but because of their faith in and obedience to the Lord.

However, the cultivated olive tree (and its branches) was not a new phenomenon that came about after the Cross, for it existed even under the Old Covenant. We could say that the branches of the cultivated olive tree signified any and all from the ancient house of Israel that had faith in God and obeyed His commands, remaining in covenant relationship with the Lord. They are His peculiar treasure.

'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession [peculiar treasure] among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine...' (Exodus 19:5 NASB [KJV])

Notice that the Old Covenant was conditional. ***If...then!*** If they obeyed His voice and if they kept His covenant, then they would be His people, a kingdom of priests as a blessing to all the families and nations on earth. But what was the outcome if they did not fulfill this condition? Instead of being blessed and being a blessing, a curse would come upon them and they would be an example of unbelief and disobedience to all the kingdoms of the earth. They would no longer be ***"My people"*** (Hosea 1, 2). Furthermore, they would cease to be a kingdom themselves, for the Lord would remove them from their land and send them into captivity, placing them under the rule of others [**iron yoke**], or would allow them to remain on their land, placing them under the rule of foreigners [**wooden yoke**] (Deuteronomy 28; Jeremiah 28:13, 14). Take special note of one of the curses that would befall them.

"You shall have olive trees throughout your territory but you will not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives will drop off." (Deuteronomy 28:40 NASB)

This is a prophetic picture of what Paul described as the cultivated olive branches being pruned off the cultivated olive tree. This is what happened when Israel broke the covenant with God. In essence, they ceased being cultivated, and they became part of the wild olive tree of the world. Using Nehemiah's phrase, they became *branches of field olives*.

Although the olive tree would be in their land if they were under a wooden yoke, they would not have the benefit of its anointing oil, for the olive would not come to maturity or full growth. In the spiritual sense, they would not have the benefit of the Spirit of God, or more contemporary, they would not receive **an earnest of the Spirit** that is given to all believers (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14).

Thus, the branches of the cultivated olive tree represent Israelites that remained faithful to the Lord in a covenant relationship. Before the Cross, all who remained faithful were truly branches of the cultivated olive tree; those who were not faithful were broken off, cast in the field to become branches of the wild olive tree, metaphorically speaking. Scripture identifies many who remained faithful, such as Joseph, Caleb, Joshua, Samuel, David, Daniel, and Nehemiah, to name a few. As the Lord reminded Elijah and Paul reminded the believers in Rome, the Lord had His 7,000 men and women who had not bowed the knee to Baal; meaning, they remained faithful to the Lord, even as the rest of the Lord's people went astray and even denied the Lord.

No free pass for the flesh

Second, again, it is also quite clear that Paul never gave his kinsmen according to the flesh a free pass to be a branch of the cultivated olive tree. Their bloodline identified them with the ancient cultivated olive tree; but, with the New Covenant, they were a branch of the cultivated olive tree of Israel *only* by faith. Again, it is worth repeating; all that are part of the cultivated olive tree are *saved by grace through faith*. This is essential.

If you continue

Third, it does seem, however, that Paul placed a condition on being a branch of the cultivated olive tree. One must be under the New Covenant, saved by grace through faith, but notice how Paul inserted a warning to those of faith being pruned from the cultivated olive tree.

(19) 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. (Romans 11:19-22 NASB)

Obviously, this does not sound like Paul's gospel of justification by grace through faith and not by works, which is unconditional.

(8) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; (9) not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB)

With his conditional clause, was Paul implying that a person could lose his or her salvation? As Paul cried out: **"May it never be!"** No; he was not stating this. However, it does appear that Paul saw another dimension to being part of the cultivated olive tree that went beyond initial salvation. Again, let us be clear that one has to be saved to be a branch of it, but there is a condition to remaining part of it that had nothing to do with losing one's salvation.

Since believers cannot lose their salvation, some commentators believe Paul was referring to nations and not to individuals. There is some merit in this thinking, but I am not sure that this fully resolves the issue. Let us see if Scripture provides some more clues, starting with the genesis of the name *Israel*.

Jacob became Israel

Fourth, Jacob was a believer in God, but it wasn't until he wrestled with the angel of the Lord all night and "prevailed" that he was given the name *Israel*, which means **"God rules."** *Jacob*, the supplanter, was his natural name given at birth, indicating his character in the flesh, but *Israel*, "God rules," became his spiritual name given by the Lord, indicating his new character in [the] spirit. Thus, *Israel* is a spiritual name that one is identified with *in* spirit, not in the flesh.

Further, *Israel* is also the **birthright name** that Jacob-Israel bestowed on Joseph's two sons **Ephraim** and **Manasseh** (Genesis 48; 1 Chronicles 5:1-2). The birthright belonged to Joseph, and this signifies the **Kingdom of God**, for it is the prophetic blessing of **fruitfulness** given to **Joseph** (Genesis 49:22), and fruitfulness refers to bringing **many sons unto glory** (Hebrews 2:10) in the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus came the **first time**, He was a **type of Judah**, for He received the scepter of Judah as the **King of Judah** (Genesis 49:10). When Jesus comes the **second time**, He is coming as a

type of Joseph, at which time He will inaugurate His kingdom to rule and reign over the nations with **His conquerors, the sons of God**. As further proof of this type, Joseph's coat was dipped in the blood of a male goat by his brothers in order to deceive Jacob (Genesis 37:31). The King of kings is coming clothed in a robe dipped in blood (Revelation 19:3).

Consequently, the branches of the cultivated olive tree signify what many commentators call *spiritual* Israel or what Paul called *the Israel of God*.

(14) But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (15) For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. (16) And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. (Galatians 6:14-16 NASB)

Paul seems to join the *new creation* and *the Israel of God* as one, but notice that he does it through the phrase **those who will walk by this rule**. Paul's rule was based on the cross of our Lord Jesus working in his life so that the world was crucified to him, and he to the world.

This is a great topic in its own right, but the point is that the Israel of God is made up of a people who, in heart, are truly no longer of this world system; they have taken up their cross and followed the Lord wherever He goes. Another way to describe them is by the term **conqueror** or **overcomer** as the Lord identified them in Revelation 2-3. The conquerors are the ones who will rule and reign with Christ in the coming kingdom; they are the glorified sons of God, **the sons of the kingdom**; the first to experience Tabernacles, the **first fruits of the kingdom of Christ**.

Thus, *Israel* is a spiritual name signifying "God rules." *Conquerors* are ones who have been crucified to the world and who submit to God's rule over their lives. Consequently, *spiritual* Israel is comprised of all the conquerors in Christ, whether genealogical descendants of Isaac or not. Stated another way, genealogical Israelites, like Paul, were branches of the cultivated olive tree not because of their bloodline or pedigree but because of their **conquering faith and obedience to God's rule**. And yet, another way of stating this is that **the branches are ones who started with Passover, moved on to Pentecost, and are pressing on toward Tabernacles**. (A point made in section 3.)

The hope of Israel, the Kingdom

Fifth, it seems clear that *spiritual* Israel signifies **the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ** (Revelation 11:15), especially in light of the next age or **Tabernacles**. Paul does not state so directly, but let us recall that Nehemiah prophetically identified the branches of both the olive and wild trees with Tabernacles. Paul's ministry was centered on Jesus and the Kingdom of God, which was the hope of Israel (Acts 28:20, 23), and the true hope of *spiritual* Israel.

Considered worthy of the Kingdom

Sixth, putting all this together, it seems to be a sound conclusion that Paul's grafting in or pruning branches from the cultivated olive tree is based on one being counted worthy to enter the coming kingdom, that is, to be counted among the conquerors who will rule and reign with Christ over the nations for 1,000 years before the *Day of God* comes when all things are made new (2 Peter 3:12; Revelation 21:5).

It all boils down to this; first one must be rooted and grounded in Christ, the rich root and the fatness of the cultivated olive tree, and then one must be **considered worthy of the Kingdom of God** (2 Thessalonians 1:5) as a conqueror in order to remain a branch of this tree.

This has nothing to do with immortal life that all who believe are promised and by grace will receive. The issue is **a question of when** one will receive this new life, either through the **first resurrection** and **transfiguration** that yields **eonian-immortal life in the next age**, the **Lord's Day**, or through the **second** or **general resurrection** that yields **immortal life** in the ages that follow, **God's Day**. **Saved, yet so as through fire** (1 Corinthians 3:15). The conquerors receive eonian-immortal life to reign with Christ in the next age, which is the heart of Revelation 2-3.

The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Revelation 3:21 ESV)

Much like the good fig tree of Judah, the cultivated olive tree rooted in Christ began with a remnant of genealogical Israelites. The good news is that by the consummation of the eons (ages), all Israel will be grafted back into the cultivated olive tree, **and so all Israel will be saved** (Romans 11:26), **so that God may be all in all** (1 Corinthians 15:28). But let us not overlook the fact that all mankind will be saved as well, for the Cross was and still is a 100% success in the reconciliation of all things (Colossians 1:16).

Vine and Branches

Actually, the conditional concept of becoming a conqueror was first given by Jesus as He spoke to His disciples about the true vine and the branches (another metaphor). If we truly want to know what a conqueror looks like and how to be one, then, as branches connected to the vine, we must learn to abide in Christ who is the true vine.

(1) "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. (2) "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. (3) "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. (4) "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. (5) "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (6) "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. (7) "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (8) "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. (9) "Just as the Father has

loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. (10) "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. (11) "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. (12) "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. (13) "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. (14) "You are My friends if you do what I command you. (15) "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. (16) "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. (17) "This I command you, that you love one another." (John 15:1-17 NASB)

Special note should be taken of Jesus' use of the conditional *if*. *If you keep My commandments ... If you abide in Me and My love and My word...* This is all done with the purpose of bearing fruit, and this only comes through abiding in the vine of love. Every branch that does not bear fruit is broken off; cast away from the vine to be dried up and burned in fire. Broken off branches will not enter into the Kingdom of God to rule and reign with Christ in the next age.

Without any doubt this is the very heart of Paul's message about his fellow kinsmen according to the flesh and the matter of being a branch broken off from the cultivated olive tree. Jesus gave further confirmation of this word as He headed toward the Cross.

"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it." (Matthew 21:43 NASB)

Jesus is looking for fruit that comes forth from those who draw their life from Him who is the vine and the root of the cultivated olive tree. All will ultimately be saved, for Paul taught that all Israel and all mankind will ultimately be saved. The important question is when one will enter into glory as a son of God. Those who do not abide in this age will be broken off, even though they have believed on Jesus. They will not lose their eternal salvation; however, they will not be counted worthy of the coming kingdom age to rule and reign with Christ, sitting on His throne. Most of genealogical Israel, called to be sons of the kingdom, lost this privilege (Matthew 8:12); only a remnant will be counted worthy. The same thing applies to all Christians today. Personally, I believe only a remnant of Christians will be counted worthy as well.

Olive Tree in the Field

Seventh, so far we have focused on the cultivated branches in light of *spiritual* Israel; but what about the wild branches?

The Greek word for a *wild olive tree* is *agrielaios*, which comes from the Greek word *agrios*, meaning "living in the fields," and *agrios* comes from the Greek word *agros*, meaning "a field." Thus, the wild olive tree is one that exists in a field. This links Paul's *wild olive tree* to Nehemiah's branches from *field olives* or an *olive tree in the field*.

"Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of other leafy trees, to make booths..." (Nehemiah 8:15 NASB)

(17) 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... (24) 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? (Romans 11:17, 24 NASB)

To understand the wild olive tree, we need to know who Paul was writing to in Rome. It is a safe assumption that most people think Paul was writing to Romans, but this is not entirely accurate.

First, Paul wrote to all that are **in Rome, called to be saints** (Romans 1:7), so his intended readers were those in one specific city, not the entire country, and who were saved by grace through faith (i.e., Christians). In other words, Paul was not trying to reach the lost in Rome but was trying to teach, encourage, and exhort the believers in Rome.

Second, history reveals that all the Jews and Christians had been expelled from Rome six years prior to Paul writing this letter, so his audience had to be rather small.

Third, history also indicates that his audience was most likely a royal family from the British Isles that had been converted by **Joseph of Arimathea** (Jesus' great uncle) who took up residence in Cornwall, England shortly after the crucifixion of Christ (~35-36 AD). This Christian family was subsequently captured and brought to Rome, and this is who Paul wrote to and identified as wild olive branches.

However, there are two more pieces of evidence that give more specificity to the identity of these British Christians. First, the words **Britain** and **British** come from Hebrew phrases that mean "**covenant land**" and "**covenant people**," respectively, and the British language in those days was a form of ancient Hebrew. This alone indicates that the British Isles had been populated in the past by Hebrews. Second, the **Sonnini Manuscript**, a very old copy of the book of Acts, contains a 29th chapter that is not included in our bibles. Some call it the lost chapter of Acts. Whether we accept this or not, it does seem to offer some valuable insight to Paul's Romans epistle and fits nicely into the migration of the Israelites out of Assyria and into Europe.

(2) For he had heard in Phoenicia that **certain of the children of Israel**, about the time of **the Assyrian captivity**, had escaped by sea to "**the isles afar off**," as spoken by the prophets, and **called by the Romans, Britain**. (3) And the Lord commanded the gospel to be preached far hence to the Gentiles [i.e., *ethnos*, nations], and to **the lost sheep of the House of Israel**.

In the Greek, the word often translated as *Gentiles* is *ethnos*, which simply means "nation" or "an ethnic group of people." It does not mean "non-Jew," which is how most seem to define the word. Further, it does not mean a "non-Israelite" either. It means "nation" and, as such, the context in which the word is used determines the nation in view. In the context of the above,

the Gentiles include the lost sheep of the house of Israel that were taken captive by the Assyrians and scattered, as well as others (non-Israelites) from the nations.

Putting all this together, an argument could be made that Paul wrote his epistle to British Christians from the genealogical lost sheep of the house of Israel, which he identified as wild olive branches grafted back into the cultivated olive tree by their conversion. In other words, **the lost sheep of the house of Israel had become branches of a wild olive tree when it broke the covenant with the Lord and were scattered among the nations.** They were broken off (pruned) from the green olive tree (Jeremiah 11:16) or the cultivated olive tree and its rich root of the Kingdom of God. They were cast into the field (i.e., world) and their national identity as *Israel* taken from them.

This leads to Jesus' mission.

Jesus' mission to the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel

Eighth, we know that Jesus came as **the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world** (John 1:29), but He also made it very clear that he had a specific mission.

But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 15:24 NASB)

This is a bit redundant but repetition is how we learn, so please bear with me. As stressed previously, when Solomon's kingdom was split in two after his death, there were two houses, **the house (nation) of Judah** and **the house (nation) of Israel**. From then on, the prophets generally referred to the two as distinct houses. Judah was comprised of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and most of the Levites. Israel was comprised of the remaining 10 tribes with **Ephraim**, the primary holder of the birthright name *Israel*, as the central tribe.

The only exception to this is when the prophets refer to all 12 tribes as one; in which case, all the tribes together are always called *Israel* and never *Judah*. Genealogically speaking, Judah could be included in Israel, but Israel is never included in Judah. The context determines these exceptions. Another way of stating this is that an Israelite could also be a Jew (from the tribe of Judah, Benjamin, or Levi), but most Israelites, based on the number of tribes, are not Jews. Yet, another way of stating this is that, as one of the tribes of Jacob-Israel, the Judahites (Jews) were also Israelites just as Reubenites or Simeonites were also Israelites but not Jews.

In this case, the lost sheep of Israel most probably refers to the 10 tribes that went into Assyrian captivity never to return as a nation. Jesus could have been referring to all 12 tribes; however, it is just as likely that he maintained the distinction made by the prophets.

This latter point seems to be supported by Jesus' use of the word *lost*.

Notice that Jesus did *not* state that He was sent to the *Jews* or to house of *Judah*. He stated that He was sent to the lost sheep of *the house of Israel*, and He told His disciples to go to them as well (Matthew 10:5-7). Scripture also tells us that He went **proclaiming the gospel of the**

kingdom (e.g., Matthew 4:23). So, He was sent to the lost sheep house of Israel, and He proclaimed the kingdom.

There are three ways one could explain the house of Israel being lost: 1) They were lost physically, that is, no one but the Lord knew where they were; 2) They were not saved spiritually; 3) They lost their national identity as the house of Israel; perhaps, they even took on entirely different names so no one knew who or where they were. Let us look at each.

1) They were lost physically, that is, no one but the Lord knew where they were. Although it might be said that the world today has lost sight of where Israel is located, for they are incorrectly looking to the Middle East and a country named *Israel*, in Paul's day, the location of the so-called lost tribes was well known by the disciples and by Jesus Himself.

Both James and Peter prove in their opening addresses in their epistles that they knew the location of all 12 tribes of Israel.

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. (James 1:1 NASB)

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen.... (1 Peter 1:1 NASB)

Some historians have suggested that Jesus traveled extensively in His early years that the Bible is silent about, including traveling to the British Isles and North America, as well as many other areas of the world. There is some evidence that some of the tribes actually migrated to America during the reign of Solomon. Think about it, if Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and He never left Judea, how did He fulfill His mission? Interesting question, but we must leave it as speculative yet probable.

It seems clear that in Jesus' day the location of the house of Israel was generally known; however, in our day, most people are ignorant of the fact that most modern-day western nations, which go by many national names, were founded or populated by Israelites. These nations are where the lost tribes of the house of Israel were hidden. Of course, migration throughout the world and intermarriage has greatly changed the gene pool over time.

2) They were not saved spiritually. In Paul's day, a remnant of grace was saved mostly from among the house of Judah (Jews) but, as Paul testified, also from among the house of Israel (Israelites). They did not have to be grafted into the cultivated olive tree because it was their tree. They were looking for the Kingdom of God, and they found it in the form of Jesus Christ.

However, they did have the potential of being broken off the cultivated olive tree **if** they failed to continue in the faith as **conquerors**, especially if they returned to the old covenant and Judaism, essentially trampling under foot the Son of God (Hebrews 10:29). All non-believing Jews and Israelites were broken off of the cultivated olive tree. By the same token, any from among the nations, including genealogical Israelites, that believed and sought to enter the

coming Kingdom of Christ as conquerors were broken off the wild olive tree and grafted into the cultivated one. These made up the first of the Christians of the Pentecostal-era Church.

3) **They lost their national identity as the house of Israel.** Again, we need to be reminded that the house of Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians, removed from their land of Samaria, and have never returned as a nation. Simply, they ceased being known as the nation or house of Israel. Their identity was lost; a condition that exists to this day.

Do not be misled by the present-day Zionist state of Israel made up of a mixed gene pool of people that call themselves Jews and Israelites. Surely, a certain percentage have DNA that could be traced to Judah but just as many could be from non-Jew descent, for down through the centuries many have converted to Judaism, thereafter identifying themselves as *Jews*. Cases in point are the **Edomites**, who were forced to convert to Judaism in 126 BC, and the **Khazars**, descendants of **Japheth**, who, as a whole kingdom, around 620 or 740 AD, willingly converted to Judaism and later became known as the **Ashkenazi Jews** throughout Eastern Europe.

In captivity, the ten tribes of Israel were called the **House of Omri** (Beth-Omri or Beth-Gomer) by the Assyrians. Hosea the prophet called them **Gomer**, after his wife who signified Israel. As they, along with some from Judah, migrated out of the regions in which they were held captive and into Europe, they became known by many names such as the **Khumri, Sacs, Anglo-Saxons, Celts, and Caucasians**, to name a few. They formed and populated many of the **European nations** that became known by other names. They then spread to America and other parts of the world as well. Most people, including many Christians, do not realize that Israel is now found within what are called the **western nations** of the world. Many nations that are considered Christian nations, even if in name only, could rightfully be called **Israelite Christian nations**. Examples include the UK, the USA, and Canada.

Thus, it is easy to see that Israel has lost its national identity but has not ceased to exist. It has merely spread out to occupy a greater portion of the earth. This was in the plan of God all along, for in this way the gospel of Christ and of His kingdom has spread throughout the earth through missionaries and a multitude of media developed or advanced by the industrialized nations.

To seek and save the lost

Ninth, Jesus stated: "**For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost**" (Luke 19:10 NASB).

Given His mission, it seems quite obvious that Jesus was drawing upon the prophetic word that He had already spoken to Ezekiel many years earlier.

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophecy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?"' (Ezekiel 34:2 NASB)

"My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them."" (Ezekiel 34:6 NASB)

(11) For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. ... (16) "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered...." (Ezekiel 34:11, 16 NASB)

Jesus is the Lord God of both the Old and the New Testaments. He is the one who kept Israel while they wandered in the wilderness, and He is the one who came seeking the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The shepherds in His day had no interest in seeking out the lost sheep as evidenced by several of Jesus' parables, including the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:4), as well as by His harsh assessment of the religious leaders of that day.

Treasure hidden in the Field

Tenth, the question is: Did Jesus find that which was lost? The answer is discovered in His kingdom parable about the hidden treasure.

(38) "And the field [*agros*] is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom... (44) The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field [*agros*], which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." (Matthew 13:38, 44 NASB)

In this parable, Jesus is the Sower and purchaser of the field; the field is the world; the good seed are the sons of the kingdom; and the treasure is Israel, His peculiar treasure (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 14:2; 26:18; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9 KJV).

For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure. (Psalm 135:4 KJV)

Again, the Greek word for field is *agros*, which adds to and supports Nehemiah's *olive tree in the field* and Paul's *wild olive tree*. The *agros* is where one finds the wild olive, and this is what is like a treasure hidden in the field (*agros*) or in the world. The plan of God was for His Son to purchase the whole field with His life, not only to redeem the peculiar treasure of Israel but all of mankind.

It was not uncommon for a man to hide his treasure on his own land. We could say that a man's land was his *safety deposit box*. Under biblical law, it is a theft to take what a man has hidden on his own land. Consequently, to be lawful, Jesus had to own the field in which He hid His treasure, if He were to claim rightful ownership of it. So, He emptied Himself, taking on the form of a bond-servant and humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death (Philippians 2:7-8), giving up His life on the Cross in order to purchase the whole world. In this way, He not only owns the field but also the treasure hidden in it. His Father sold it to Him.

'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.' (Psalm 2:8 NASB)

Do we think that the Son of God refused this offer? Of course He didn't. Jesus asked His Father and received the whole world when He offered Himself up on the Cross, paying the maximum price with His own blood in order to purchase the whole field of the world in which He had hid His treasure. The reason He hid it in the field is because it was not their time to be revealed; much more had to happen before their identity can be restored; a fact Jesus made clear to a question asked by His disciples.

"Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" ... "It is not for you to know the time and the epochs which the Father has fixed by His won authority" (Acts 1:6-7).

The breaking off of Israelite branches from the cultivated olive tree was necessary for God to ultimately save the whole world. While they are cast off from their tree, God is grafting wild olive branches into His cultivated tree.

Isaiah stated this glorious good news very clearly.

(6) "Also the foreigners [from other nations] who join themselves to the LORD [salvation], to minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the sabbath and holds fast My covenant [New Covenant]; (7) even those I will bring to My holy mountain [kingdom] and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." (8) The Lord GOD, who gathers the dispersed of Israel, declares, "Yet others [from other nations] I will gather to them, to those already gathered." (Isaiah 56:6-8 NASB)

But this glorious news goes back further to Solomon as he dedicated the temple.

(41) "Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name's sake (42) (for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, (43) hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name. (1 Kings 8:41-43 NASB)

Notice the inclusiveness in both sets of verses. It is not merely about Israel; it is about ALL peoples. Israel was and is meant to be a blessing to ALL the nations of the earth.

But it all goes back even further, starting with the promise to Abraham.

(17) The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, (18) since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed? (Genesis 18:17-18 NASB)

Solomon, Ezekiel, and others simply repeated or confirmed the truth that God has always intended to bless ALL the nations and ALL the families of the earth, and His plan calls for doing this through His peculiar treasure, now known as the Israel of God.

God's plan has been and continues to be to reach ALL the nations on earth, reconciling ALL things to Himself and, ultimately, bringing ALL mankind into His house, until ALL Israel is saved.

It starts with Abraham called to be a blessing to **ALL families on earth**. Today, ALL who belong to Christ are Abraham's spiritual descendants; or, put another way, those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer (Galatians 3:9, 29). They are called *spiritual* Israel and **Christians**. Ultimately, ALL of mankind will come into this blessing.

Then, the Lord called Israel to be a priestly nation to **ALL nations**, and He had Solomon build a temple as the house of prayer for **ALL people**. Then, the Lord cast off Israel and hid them in the world, so that, ultimately, they would be reunited in His kingdom along with **ALL nations** of the earth.

This is the glorious plan of God; it is the glorious gospel of God. Since Calvary, God has been progressively implementing His plan, starting with the Jews. This is going back a bit, but it seems necessary to complete the whole picture.

To the Jew first, also to the Greek

Eleventh, Jesus was of the tribe of Judah and most of the people that He reached in Judea were Jews of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Levi (1 Kings 12:21), not the Israelites of the other ten tribes that had been scattered among the nations three centuries earlier.

This does not mean that the ten tribes were totally absent from the region. Undoubtedly, some migrated back to the area over time and others continued to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the celebration of the feasts (Luke 2:25, 36). The same thing occurred after Solomon's kingdom was split up into the two houses (2 Chronicles 15:9). Nevertheless, the ten tribes continued to be lost among the nations, no longer known nationally as *Israel*, unlike Judah that existed in Palestine. Even though the Jews were under Roman rule, they were still identified as *Judah* and identified by Jesus as the fig tree containing both good and bad figs.

However, it is Paul who makes the progression clear.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Romans 1:16 NASB)

In referring to the Greeks, Paul was not referring to the nations or, as some would say, the *Gentiles*. Again, the Greek word for *Gentiles* is *ethnos*, which simply means "nation" or "an ethnic group of people." It does not mean "non-Jew" or "non-Israelite." The context in which the word is used determines the nation in view.

The Jewish nation of Jesus' day was an *ethnos*, just like all the other nations of that day. If one insists on using the word *Gentile*, generically speaking, then Judah and the Jews should be

called *Gentiles* as well. To prove the point, consider the complaint that came from the chief priests and Pharisees of Judah.

"If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation [*ethnos*, the same word from which the word *Gentile* is translated]." (John 11:48 NASB)

Acts confirms Paul's word about the Jews and Greeks.

In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. (Acts 14:1 NASB)

And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. (Acts 18:4 NASB)

This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 19:10 NASB)

When Paul wrote that salvation came to the **Jew first and also to the Greek** he was not referring to all the nations with his use of the term *Greek*; he was referring specifically to those who spoke Greek, which was the predominant language of Paul's day.

On one level, it is obvious that Paul was trying to persuade Greek *non*-Jews; however, on another level, he was trying to persuade Hellenes or *Hellenistic* Jews; Jews that had adopted the Greek language and much of the Greek culture through acculturation (see Acts 6). Notice in the first two verses cited above that Jews and Greeks were in the synagogues. Who were these Greeks? Why were they in the synagogue if they were not Jews?

When the Jews were taken captive by the Babylonians, like the Israelites, a remnant returned to Judea but most remained behind and over time some migrated to other areas and nations. Some ended in Greek speaking areas/nations where they were integrated into their host society. Obviously, some also migrated back to Judea and others made pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the feasts. However, the **Hellenistic Jews** were so distinct from nonintegrated **Hebrew Jews** that the Hellenes had their own synagogues in Jerusalem.

So, when Paul said the gospel went to the Jew first and also to the Greek, he could have been referring to the two types of Jews receiving the good news first. Again, we need not exclude *non*-Jews from this group, but it is clear that the emphasis in the early ministry of the disciples, including that of Paul, was on reaching the Jews.

From the Jew and the Greek the gospel then went to the lost sheep of the house of Israel that the disciples reached in their day, as well as to many from among the nations (generally called *Gentiles*). With this, many wild olive branches were grafted into the cultivated olive tree, building the Kingdom of God in many hearts through a **covenant relationship** with the Lord Jesus. And, this has continued to our day; all to the glory of God. Just so that there is no

confusion; this is the **true Church of God, the true Christian Church, which is the Body of Christ, the true Israel of God.**

(5) I will be like the dew to Israel; He will blossom like the lily, and he will take root like the cedars of Lebanon. (6) His shoots will sprout, and his beauty will be like the olive tree and his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon. (Hosea 14:5-6 NASB)

Christ the Root

Twelfth, up to this point, we have focused on the branches, but what about the tree itself, especially its rich root? The cultivated olive tree signifies God's tree that is rooted and grounded in His Son, the rich root of the tree; it is spiritual and of the Spirit. But, in respect to Christ, it is also more than this, for His life fills the entire tree—the root, the trunk, the branches, the leaves, and the fruit and its oil.

Another way to look at it is that the cultivated olive tree is rooted and grounded in the **Word of God**. The Son of God, the Lord Jesus, is the Word of God and, as such, He is the rich root. We could say that He is also the fatness of the cultivated olive tree. The fact of the matter is that, metaphorically speaking, **Christ is the root and trunk of the tree, and the branches are collectively spiritual Israelites that draw their life from Him through His Spirit.**

Of course, there are other facets of Christ that could be applied to the root. For example, it speaks of righteousness. **The root of the righteous will not be moved** (Proverb 12:3). **The root of the righteous yields fruit** (Proverb 12:12). After all, **the Lord is our Righteousness** (Jeremiah 23:6).

Another example is given through Isaiah who prophesied of Christ coming as a shoot from the stem of Jesse and of the two works of Christ manifested in His first and second comings. A glorious day is coming when **the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea** (Isaiah 11:9).

Take special note of the next verse and what Jesus Himself stated at the end of Revelation.

Then in that day the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious. (Isaiah 11:10 NASB)

"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." (Revelation 22:16 NASB)

Jesse was the father of David the king, who became king over both Judah and Israel. Jesus was from this root and is the King of kings in fulfillment of the prophetic blessing given by Jacob-Israel to his son Judah (Genesis 49:10). Christ is also the holder of the birthright as a type of Joseph and as the firstborn Son of all creation (Colossians 1:15). He alone will repair the breach between Judah and Israel and will bring forth the **United Kingdom of Israel, the true spiritual Church of God**, which is also **New Jerusalem**.

In the days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will blossom and sprout, and they will fill the whole world with fruit. (Isaiah 27:6 NASB)

Again, this is speaking of the age to come, the Kingdom or Tabernacles Age, in which Christ will rule over the nations. Notice how the nations will resort to the root of Jesse. This is similar to the nations being grafted into the cultivated olive tree whose root is Christ. Also note that the whole earth will be blessed through the fruit of Israel, the cultivated olive tree.

In this respect, the cultivated olive tree also signifies the Kingdom of God on earth among the nations.

Thus, a branch being cut off from the cultivated olive tree refers to people (*ethnos*; nations) being cut off from entering into and enjoying the age to come. **The starting point for being grafted into the tree is initial salvation, but remaining a branch of the tree depends on being found worthy to enter into the 1,000-year reign of Christ over our present earth as an immortal, glorified son of God; the company of conquerors who will be a blessing to all the nations on earth as they lead them to learn righteousness and how to be good citizens of Christ's kingdom on earth.** This is all in preparation for the glorious day (age) that follows, God's Day, the day in which all of Israel, as well as all of mankind, will be saved.

Moving on...

10. Zechariah's Vision of Two Olive Trees and Two Branches

Next, let us consider Zechariah's vision of two olive trees and its branches, and a lampstand. His vision most parallels John's vision of the two witnesses but with some differences. Zechariah saw olive branches; whereas, John did not record that he saw any, and John saw two lampstands, which were not described in any detail; whereas, Zechariah only saw one, which was described with some detail.

(2) He said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it; (3) also two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side." (Zechariah 4:2-3 NASB)

As the prophet pondered this vision, he was puzzled over it, so he inquired of the angel.

(4) Then I said to the angel who was speaking with me saying, "What are these, my lord?" (5) So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." (Zechariah 4:4-5 NASB)

We are not told directly which part of the vision the prophet was questioning. Surely, Zechariah understood the meaning of the lampstand, but it seems that he was puzzled about the olive trees and their branches, for later he inquired more directly a second time when the angel obviously did not answer his question to his satisfaction.

(11) Then I said to him, "What are these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?" (12) And I answered the second time and said to him, "What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden oil from themselves?" (Zechariah 4:11-12 NASB)

Zechariah's Two Branches

Because the angel's answer to the first question is more involved and germane to this study, we will consider the answer to this second question first.

(13) So he answered me, saying, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." (14) Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth." (Zechariah 4:13-14 NASB)

The *two branches* of the olive tree were identified as *two anointed ones*, which, contextually, refer to **Joshua, the high priest**, and **Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah**, who were raised up to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple that had been destroyed when Judah was taken into Babylonian captivity.

A remnant of Jews had returned to Jerusalem along with them to do the work. However, they faced many challenges in their attempt to fulfill God's word. They were challenged by foes from within and without. Within Judah there was lethargy, smallness of vision, and lack of faith. Without Judah there were "mighty mountains" of opposition and evil cunning of the enemies of God; obstacles that could not be overcome by human power. Nevertheless, they were urged by the Lord to be strong and complete the task. The Lord Himself would reduce the mountain of opposition to level ground, and the victory would be won by the Spirit of God and by His grace, not by human power.

In the midst of all of this, Haggai was raised up to speak a word to the people to consider their ways. They heard and obeyed, and the Lord promised that His Spirit would abide in their midst. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the spirit of Joshua, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people, and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts (Haggai 1:14). They were a remnant of grace.

But also note that Haggai prophesied in a way that points to a day far greater than the day of Joshua and Zerubbabel.

"Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people saying, 'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison? But now take courage, Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD, 'take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,' declares the LORD, 'and work; for I am with you,' declares the LORD of hosts. 'As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!' "For thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. I will shake all the nations;

and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the LORD of hosts. 'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts." (Haggai 2:2-9 NASB)

A glory is to come to the house of the Lord that is far greater than the former glory, and it will come about as the Lord of hosts shakes the heavens and the earth. It will come **"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts.**" When it is finished, a shout will go forth, **"Grace, grace to it!"** (Zechariah 4:6-7). In that day, there will be peace.

Within this context, Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor of Judah were identified as the two olive tree *branches* beside the golden lampstand serving as conduits for the oil that was coming forth from the tree. They were the anointed witnesses of that day, for they stood by the Lord of the whole earth. But keep in mind that they were branches of the olive trees, meaning they came forth from it; however, they were not olive trees per se.

They were simply conduits of the oil of the tree, the Spirit of Grace that was needed to serve the Lord in the rebuilding project during times of trial and conflict. Joshua and Zerubbabel were "sons of oil" ministering to the Lord and to the remnant that had returned to Jerusalem.

As Fausset stated in explaining the oil: ***"The supply of grace comes not from a dead reservoir of oil, but through living "olive trees." Ordinances and ministers are channels, not the grace itself. "The Lord Jesus has the fullness of grace from double olive trees of the Holy Spirit, so as to be at once our priest and king; He is the tree, ministers the branches, "emptying the golden oil out of themselves" for the supply of the church and to the glory of the Author of grace."***

Finally, these sons of oil were types of the builders of the true Church of God, representing both the priestly and the kingly role of the conquerors of Christ who, like Christ, are **according to the order of Melchizedek, the King of Salem (King of Peace) and the Priest of the Most High God** (Hebrews 5:5-6; 7). They are types of the sons of God that are being built up as **New Jerusalem**, which is God's present-day building project. **And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.** (Revelation 5:10 KJV)

Zechariah's Two Olive Trees

Now, let us return to the first question Zechariah asked of the angel.

(4) Then I said to the angel who was speaking with me saying, "What are these, my lord?" (5) So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." (Zechariah 4:4-5 NASB)

What was Zechariah referring to when he asked about *"these"*? In other words, what was he referring to in the vision in his question to the angel?

Zechariah first told the angel that he saw the lampstand. Next, he saw the two olive trees. Since they are the last subject noun of verse 3 before he asked the question, it is possible that the

prophet was referring to them and not so much the lampstand or its bowls. Another indication is that Zechariah inquired about "*these*," meaning more than one. Of course, he could have been referring back to all that he saw, so we need to open to the possibility.

(6) The he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts. (7) 'What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain; and he will bring forth the top stone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!'" (Zechariah 4:6-7 NASB)

Interestingly, the angel said the two olive trees signified a specific word of the Lord as an encouragement to Zerubbabel; the Lord was in the work the governor was called to do and that it would be completed by His Spirit and by His grace.

This is the most obvious way to explain the answer the angel gave to Zechariah in reference to the two trees, but perhaps there is another way to view it that has greater spiritual significance.

Pull back a bit from these two verses; what four words do you see? How about the words ***word, Spirit, grace, and mountain?***

Let's break it apart.

First, the angel had asked the prophet if he knew what they were, meaning the olive trees. In explaining the olive trees, the angel first said, "**This is the word of the Lord.**" Then, the angel specifically said the word had to do with the Spirit of the Lord, and he summed it up with "grace, grace."

The ***word*** and ***grace*** go hand-in-hand. In fact, His word is about His grace; or as the book of Acts records, it is called the word of His grace.

Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands. (Acts 14:3 NASB)

"And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." (Acts 20:32 NASB)

Of course, our Lord Jesus is the Word, and He is full of Grace.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 NASB)

Second, the word of the Lord is also likened to a sword.

And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:17 NASB)

As the epistle to the Hebrews tells us, the sword of the Spirit is sharper than any physical sword of man.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12 NASB)

It is this sword that will settle all things between God and man, which leads to the next point.

Third, nestled between the words *Spirit* and *grace* is the word *mountain*, which scripturally signifies a *kingdom*. What will bring down the kingdoms of this world and usher in the Kingdom of Christ? Will the kingdoms of men come down by the physical sword, or **by the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God**? They will fall by the surgical hand of God wielding the sword of the Spirit.

Putting all of this together, the spiritual emphasis of Zechariah is not on Zerubbabel per se but on ***the Word, the Spirit, the Grace, and the Kingdom***.

We could sum it up like this: **The Spirit of the Lord spoke the Word of the Lord, which is the Word of His Grace and of His Truth, and this is what will bring forth the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.**

Of course, all of this speaks of our Lord Jesus who is the Word and who is full of Grace and Truth and who is the King of the Kingdom of God. He is also the High Priest ministering in the heavenly sanctuary on behalf of His people. In other words, He is the King-Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6; 7:1-3).

He is all of these! And from the mouth of the King of kings will come the two-edged sword to divide and conquer.

From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. (Revelation 19:15 NASB)

All of Scripture, both old and new, both Hebrew and Greek, reveal the Son in types, shadows, and in reality or antitype as He is explained and manifested, especially throughout the New Testament. After His resurrection but before His final ascension, Jesus said...

"These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." (Luke 24:44 NASB)

The first book of the Bible starts with God the Creator, and the last book of the Bible starts with *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. The Creator God is none other than Jesus, the Son of God, and the Word that was in the beginning who spoke **"Let there be light"** (Genesis 1:3).

(16) For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. (17) He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16-17 NASB)

(1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was in the beginning with God. (3) All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (4) In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. (5) The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. (John 1:1-5 NASB)

Obviously, volumes could be filled in an attempt to reveal the Word of God as given to us in the written word, but this is way beyond the scope of this particular study. The point that needs to be written on our hearts is that the olive trees are intimately connected not only to the written Word of God but also to His Son who is the Word.

The olive trees signify the Word of God that presses out of its fruit the fatness of the olive oil that flows forth as the Life of the tree anointing its branches to fill the lamps to fill the earth with the **Light of the World**. As Jesus said: "**You are the light of the world**" (Matthew 5:14).

Now, all of this raises another question: Why were there two olive trees; why not just one? The simple answer is because they serve as a witness, for **the law of the witness** requires two or three witnesses to confirm a matter (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15).

Given the angel's answer to Zechariah, the two witnesses could be the Spirit and Grace, or the Spirit and the Word, or the Spirit and the Word of His Grace. It is quite difficult to separate these, so, in a sense, these three combinations are all witnesses.

In a much broader sense there is another possibility.

The Old Testament and the New Testament

In his *People's New Testament, Commentary on the Two Witnesses*, Barton Warren Johnson (1833-1894), an American minister and educator, suggested that the entire Bible, divided into the Old and the New Testaments, could be the two witnesses of Revelation 11. This is taken up in the next section; but, since it dovetails the above, it is best to deal with it at this point.

Brother Johnson did not make a distinction between the two olive trees and the two lampstands; he simply grouped them together as the two witnesses. I don't believe this is the best way to interpret the two witnesses; however, if we take his insight about the two witnesses as referring to the two olive trees, I believe he adds to our understanding up to this point and draws us closer to a sound interpretation of the witnesses than most other commentators.

The following is an extract from his commentary on the two witnesses of Revelation 11.

"There are a number of facts recorded here which must be true of witnesses, and the business of the interpreter is simply to ascertain whether there is anything of which they are true and which would correspond with these facts.

(1) The first one of the fourteen facts I have noted is that **there were only two witnesses**. I have lying before me an open Bible. I find that the book of Revelation is in what is called the *New Testament*. **The whole Bible is divided into two great divisions, which are called the Old and New Testaments**. There are, then *two* Testaments. Note further that the term *testament* is a word that signifies to bear *witness*. It is derived from a Latin word, *testor*, which means "I testify." The two testaments, then, imply *two* witnesses. **We have, therefore, in the Old Testament and New Testament, two witnesses**, whether they are those described by John or not.

(2) **These two witnesses of the Bible each testify of the Lord**. He said to the Jews concerning the Old Testament Scriptures, "They testify of me." The Apostle John says concerning his life of the Savior, "These things were written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." One of these witnesses testifies of the Lord in type and prophecy; the other testifies by its history of facts.

(3) **The two witnesses are the Lord's**. He gives them their power and they testify of Him. Thus far the two witnesses of the Bible correspond exactly with the two witnesses of the prophecy.

(4) The two witnesses of the Word are fed with **the oil of inspiration** and give forth **light**.

(5) These two witnesses speak by **inspiration**, or "**prophecy**."

(6) Passing over some marks of minor importance, we come to the statement that the two witnesses have **power to destroy**. The Word of God can save and it can destroy. It can justify and it can condemn. In the Judgment the fate of men will be decided by the Word. If the reader will turn to Revelation 19:11-15, and read what is written of the conquests, triumphs, and destruction by the Word of God, he will require nothing more upon this point. In fact everything stated of the power of the two witnesses has been affirmed of the Word of God.

(7) It is said that for 1260 days the witness shall prophesy in **sackcloth**. Every reader knows that for ages the Bible was forbidden to the people and locked up in the **dead languages**. It was even a crime, for which many suffered death, to have the Bible in the tongue of the people. It is proper that we should consider here this period of mourning in which, **if I am correct, the witness of the Old Testament and New Testament shall be given in sorrow**."

The Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God

I would add to the above by referencing some Scripture that specifically speaks of the nature of the Word of God, which we know includes the Law, the words spoken through the Prophets, and the Psalms. Without doubt, what follows explains some of the work performed by the two witnesses that is especially signified by the two olive trees.

First, the Word of God is likened to fire, or we could say, the fire of God is the Law of God. This is important, for fire comes forth from the mouths of the two witnesses.

"Is not My word like fire?" declares the LORD, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock?"
(Jeremiah 23:29 NASB)

The voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire. (Psalm 29:7 NASB)

"Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words [commands, law] from the midst of the fire."
(Deuteronomy 4:36 NASB)

From his right hand went a fiery law for them. (Deuteronomy 33:2 KJV)

God's word is His law, and it is a fiery law. In fact, God's throne is described as a blazing flame of fire. Both Daniel and John were given visions of the judgment of God going forth from His throne. Compare Daniel 7:9-10 and Revelation 20:11-15 and you will discover that Daniel saw the throne of God ablaze with fire, along with a river of fire flowing from the throne, and John saw a lake of fire before the throne. In other words, the river became a lake. Putting the two visions together reveals that the source of the fire is the throne. In fact, the throne is ablaze with fire, which speaks of the law emanating from God Himself.

Further confirmation of all this comes through Jesus Himself.

(7) For the mystery of lawlessness already is working, only he is holding back now, until it comes out of the midst. (8) And then "the Lawless One" will be revealed, "whom" "the Lord" "will consume" "by the spirit of His mouth," and will bring to nought by the brightness of His presence. Isa. 11:4 (2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 LITV)

(11) And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. (12) His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. (13) He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. (14) And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. (15) From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. (16) And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." (Revelation 19:11-16 NASB)

These verses do not say that fire will come from His mouth; however, we do know that His word is like fire, so we can assume that, figuratively speaking, the Lord's words are like fire that consumes. Without doubt, we know that what proceeds from the mouth of the Lord is His word that is like a sharp sword. Again, the epistle to the Hebrews makes the point for us.

(12) For the Word of God is living, and powerfully working, and sharper than every two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of both soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge of the thoughts and intentions of the heart; (13) and there is no creature unrevealed before Him; but all things are naked and laid open to His eyes, with whom is our account. (Hebrews 4:12-13 LITV)

Paul aptly described the word as the sword of the Spirit.

(17) Also, take "the helmet of salvation," and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God; Isa. 59:17 LXX-Isa. 11:4; MT-Isa. 49:2; LXX and MT-Hos. 6:5 (18) through all prayer and petition, praying at all times in the Spirit, and watching to this same thing with all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints. (Ephesians 6:17-18 LITV)

It is a rather sad commentary on Christendom of our day that so many Christians think nothing of taking up the physical sword of man to deal with their enemies, rather than taking up the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Perhaps the physical sword was necessary or allowed under the Old Covenant. However, no place in Scripture are we told to take up the physical sword under the New Covenant.

Even Jesus chided Peter for taking up the sword and cutting off the ear of the slave (John 18:10-11).

Besides, in speaking of the apparent Jews that rejected Him as the King of Judah and usurped His throne, Jesus warned: **"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force"** (Matthew 11:12 NASB).

Finally, Paul made it abundantly clear that our battle is not fought with the physical sword that can only kill the flesh because our war is not with the flesh but with spiritual fortresses and forces.

(3) For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, (4) for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. (5) We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, (6) and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6 NASB)
For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12 NASB)

11. Olive Trees – Witnesses

Now, with all this background, we come to the last reference to olive trees and the one that most closely aligns with Zechariah. It comes from John's Patmos vision recorded in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*.

(3) "And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." (4) These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. (Revelation 11:3-4 NASB)

The two lampstands refer to the Word of God and the true Spirit-filled Church of God, specifically, two churches (Revelation 1:20) drawing their life from the rich root of the olive tree and manifesting the Kingdom of God on earth. The fuel for their light was (is) the Word of God, both the Old and the New Testaments.

In speaking the parables of the kingdom, Jesus referred to things both new and old, which must speak of the entire 66 books of Scripture. Of course, when He spoke this, the full canon was not completed; however, His spoken words and teachings served as the basis for the new that explained the old that would come along shortly after His death and resurrection.

And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old." (Matthew 13:52 NASB)

Thus, the olive trees most likely symbolize the same thing as already seen in Zechariah; they symbolize the **enduring** Word of His Grace, the Sword of His Spirit that gives light, life, and truth to the true Church of God and guides her through all the trials, persecutions, and tribulations of life, all the while expressing the Kingdom of God, which is **righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit** (Romans 14:17).

BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you. ... The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever. ... Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (1 Peter 1:25; Isaiah 40:8; Psalm 119:105 NASB)

12. Mount of Olives

Finally, to close out this study, there is one loose end that speaks to the significance of the Mount of Olives (mountain of olive trees) in the life of Jesus.

Jesus often went up on the Mount of Olives to be with His Father in prayer (Luke 21:37; John 8:1). Jesus approached Jerusalem by way of the Mount of Olives as He made His descent to face the Cross of Calvary as the King of Judah and Savior of the world (Matthew 21:1; Luke 19:29, 37). He spoke of the coming of His kingdom from the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24:3). After He instituted the **Lord's Supper** with His disciples, Jesus and His disciples went out to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30). He entered the garden of **Gethsemane** (meaning, **oil-press**) at the foot

of the Mount of Olives, which was probably where the oil was pressed out of the olives taken from the surrounding hills. Here He entered into the anguish of His soul (Matthew 26:36-57). Finally, the Lord Jesus **ascended** back to His Father in heaven from the Mount of Olives, and He is returning to earth in like fashion (Acts 1:9-12).

Is it any wonder why the olive tree has such great spiritual meaning in the life of the true Church of Christ?

Conclusion

Christ is the root and trunk of the tree, and the branches are collectively *spiritual* Israelites, the remnant of conquerors who draw their life from Christ through His Spirit, signified by olive oil. The tree speaks of the covenant relationship between Christ the Head and His Body of conquerors that lives by the Word of His Grace and shines forth as His Light in the world and in the midst of the House of God (Church of God).

The natural olive tree grows best in the **direct sun**, is suited for **rocky** calcareous subsoil, and its leaves are leathery and silvery green, suggestive of "**tenacious strength**."

The spiritual olive tree, the true Church of God, *spiritual* Israel, grows best in the light of the **Sun of Righteousness** (Malachi 4:2), the **Son of God**, and thrives in the rocky places of adversity; the trials, tribulations, and even persecutions of life. No matter what comes her way, even if she is struck and beaten down like an olive in the press of life, just as she has been in various periods of her history, she has come back to life stronger than before. The more the Church has been persecuted, the more she has thrived and the more the oil and fatness have come forth. She is tenacious. Consider the billions of Christians on earth today.

The natural olive tree is **very hardy** and **lives a long time due** to its **drought, disease, and fire resistance**, due, in large part, to its extensive and **robust root system** that is capable of regenerating itself even if the trunk is destroyed by fire.

The spiritual olive tree of **the true Church** resists all that comes against her; she will reign forever, for her robust root system and trunk is the very Creator of life itself, the One who called life into being by His Word and by His Grace and who will bring peace and life to all the nations, all mankind, even all of creation. This is **New Jerusalem**, God's building project, which is **a holy temple in the Lord**, being built into **a dwelling of God in spirit**, a **one new man** conformed to the image of the **Son of God** (Ephesians 2:15, 19-22).

And, finally, all of this speaks mightily of the **Kingdom of God** that rules in hearts today but will rule ALL the nations beginning in the next age of **Tabernacles** when the true sons of God, the king-priests according to the order of Melchizedek, are manifested to rule and reign with Christ over the nations in the earthly realm and to minister to God in the spirit realm.

The following chart summarizes the primary signification of the olive tree.

Olive...	Symbology	Scripture
Leaf	Life; Renewal; Revival	Genesis 8:10-11
Oil	Holy Anointing (service, consecration) Fuel for Light Good of the Promised Land (Tabernacles) Grace & the Spirit of God	Exodus 30:23-25 Exodus 25:6 Deuteronomy 8:7-8 Zechariah 4:6-7, 12
Wood	Entering the Presence of God through the Door and the Life of Christ	1 Kings 6:31-35 John 10:7, 9
Plants	Fruitfulness (children) Fruit of the kingdom (of the Spirit, character)	Psalms 128:1-6 Matthew 21:43
Branches (cultivated, wild/field)	Lost sheep of the house of Israel Anointed ones Conduits of His Word, Grace, Spirit Remnant of Grace Nations (<i>ethnos</i>) Conquerors Tabernacle booths (sons of <i>spiritual</i> Israel) Glorification of the sons of God	Ezekiel 34:2, 11, 16 Matthew 13:38, 44; 15:24 Zechariah 4:11-14 Zechariah 4 Romans 11:1-5; 19-22 Romans 11:12, 25 Revelation 2, 3 Nehemiah 8:13-18 Romans 8:18-23 1 Thessalonians 1:10 Hebrews 2:10
Tree	Covenant Relationship (House of God) Fatness; Choicest, Beautiful Nation Kingdom of priests, holy nation House of Israel (all 12 tribes) <i>Spiritual</i> Israel, <i>New Jerusalem</i> Kingdom of God (mountain) Witness of His Word, Grace, Spirit Witness of the Kingdom of God	Exodus 19:5-6 Judges 9:8-9; Hosea 14:6 Psalm 52:6-9 Jeremiah 11:10, 16 Galatians 6:14-16 Revelation 21, 22 Zechariah 4:7 Zechariah 4:11-14 Revelation 11:3-4, 15
Root	Christ ... <i>I AM</i> ... The Root of David (i.e., the Kingdom) The Word of Life The Resurrection, Life, Light, Door Full of Grace, Truth, the Holy Spirit King-Priest (Melchizedek) The Anointed One (the Christ, Messiah) Abrahamic Covenant	Revelation 22:16 Isaiah 11:10; 27:6 Romans 11:17 1 John 1:1 John 11:25; 8:12; 10:7, 9 John 1:14; Luke 4:1 Hebrews 5,7 Genesis 12:1-3; 17:2-6; 18:17-18