

Romans 11:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.

Analysis

For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy—aparchē (ἀπαρχή, "firstfruit") refers to the firstfruits offering (Numbers 15:17-21). When the first portion is consecrated, the whole batch shares that holiness. Paul likely refers to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) as the firstfruit, making their descendants (the lump, phýrama, φύραμα) holy—set apart to God. Alternatively, the Jewish remnant (vv. 1-5) could be the firstfruit, guaranteeing the future salvation of the whole.

The second metaphor reinforces this: **and if the root be holy, so are the branches** (rizā, ρίζα, "root"). The root is the patriarchs; the branches are their descendants. Paul establishes covenant continuity: God's election of the fathers guarantees His faithfulness to their children. This sets up the olive tree metaphor (vv. 17-24). The holiness Paul speaks of is covenantal, not necessarily salvific for every individual—but it means God has not abandoned Israel corporately.

Historical Context

The firstfruits offering symbolized consecrating the entire harvest to God. By extension, the patriarchs' election consecrated the nation. This covenantal holiness explains God's ongoing commitment despite Israel's unfaithfulness—He remains faithful to His sworn promises (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the 'firstfruit' principle demonstrate God's covenant faithfulness across generations?
2. What is the difference between covenantal holiness and individual salvation, and why does this matter?
3. How do the patriarchs' election and God's promises to them guarantee His purposes for Israel's future?

Interlinear Text

εἰ	δὲ	ἡ	ἀπαρχὴ	ἀγία	καὶ	τὸ	φύραμα·	καὶ
if	For	G3588	the firstfruit	be holy	holy and	G3588	the lump	holy and
G1487	G1161		G536	G40	G2532		G5445	G2532

εἰ	ἡ	ῥίζα	ἀγία	καὶ	οἱ	κλάδοι
if	G3588	the root	be holy	holy and	G3588	are the branches
G1487		G4491	G40	G2532		G2798

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 3:9 (Parallel theme): Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase:

James 1:18 (Parallel theme): Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Ezekiel 44:30 (Parallel theme): And the first of all the firstfruits of all things, and every oblation of all, of every sort of your oblations, shall be the priest's: ye shall also give unto the priest the first of your dough, that he may cause the blessing to rest in thine house.

Jeremiah 2:21 (Parallel theme): Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?

Leviticus 23:10 (Parallel theme): Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest:

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