

'Broken Branches': A Pauline Metaphor Gone Awry?

(Romans 11:11-24)¹

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ABSTRACT

In the stumbling allegory of Rom 11:11-15, some Israelites are depicted as "stumbling," but it is emphatically stated that they have *not* "fallen." This state is largely attributed to God's initiative rather than their failure, in order to reach the nations. In the olive tree allegory of vv. 16-24, Paul portrays some Israelites as "broken" (ἐκκλάω) branches through v. 21, because of their unfaithfulness. This word choice does not make it clear that they are broken *off*, but can mean that they are simply broken, remaining on the tree in a wounded state. However, later in the allegory, in vv. 22-24, these branches are referred to as "cut off" (ἐκκόπτω), to frame his *a fortiori* threat to the grafted-in wild olive cutting, and to point out that God is able to graft the natural branches back on again. While *broken*, as in wounded, can reflect the image of *stumbling* developed in the prior allegory, *cut off* instead parallels the idea of *falling*. This inference carries a sense of finality that leads Paul to assert God's miraculous power to reverse the normal course of events. How can these two very different depictions of the state of non-Christ-believing Israelites be reconciled?

I propose the image of stumbling in the earlier allegory better describes the state of these Israelites, while the second allegory, that of the olive tree, is instead designed to emphasize the precarious place of the non-Israelite Christ-believers. It seeks to confront incipient arrogance toward these Israelites, as if the Christ-believing Gentiles are supplanting them in God's favor. These Israelites "branches" thus serve as an *a fortiori* warning. If God is willing to chastise natural branches so severely, then all the more will he break off alien branches grafted in, that is, those of the nations who presume to delight in the thought that they have replaced these Israelites, rather than being deeply concerned, as is Paul, with their restoration.

Interpreters thus have choices to make when seeking to characterize the state of Israel, or better, Israelites who are not Christ-believers committed to joining Paul in proclaiming the message of good to the nations, as well as how the church, made up of Christ-believing Jews and *also* Gentiles, relates to Paul's concept of Israel. These choices also include how much to focus on the historical thrust of Paul's allegorical argument, aimed at confronting Christ-believing Gentiles' arrogance toward non-Christ-believing Israelites, rather than on the development of other inferences, for example, to judge these Israelites or their descendants as separated from the "irrevocable" covenant relationship with God to which Paul appeals.

INTRODUCTION

Paul's olive tree allegory is as puzzling as it is popular.² From country preachers to Oxford professors, many arguments and theological positions appeal to this language to portray Paul's

¹ I want to thank Andy Johnson, Dieter Mitternacht, Daniel Stramara, and the conference members for helpful discussions of earlier versions.

² I use allegory to refer to this imagery because this is an extended metaphor, following the lead of Philip E. Esler, "Ancient Oleiculture and Ethnic Differentiation: The Meaning of the Olive-Tree Image in Romans 11," *JSNT* 26.1 (2003): 103-24 (106-7); Max Black, "Metaphor," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society for the Systematic Study of Philosophy* 55 (1954): 273-94 (275). By metaphor, I mean a figure of speech (trope) that communicates a thing, idea,

view of Israel and the Church. To state but a few examples, elements of it are employed to proclaim the supplanting of Israel by the Church,³ the conflation of Israel with the Church,⁴ and especially that Christian Gentiles are grafted into Israel, which the tree is understood to represent. This Israel is implicitly regarded to be and often explicitly renamed "spiritual" or "true Israel," thereby ensuring that it is not mistakenly confused with the Israel that was and is composed of empirical descendents of Jacob, plus those who have become part of this lineage by way of proselyte conversion. In essence, "Israel" functions as a metonym for "Christianity."

However, Paul states none of these important connections in plain language. Bearing witness to this fact, Paul's metaphorical language is often re-employed to state significant theological propositions, rather than being restated in non-metaphorical terms. Thus when one wishes to argue that Christian Gentiles are incorporated into Israel, the proposition is often expressed in metaphor: the Gentiles have been "grafted into Israel." Yet people are not "grafted" into nations. Israel is not actually a "tree," and Israelites and Gentiles are not "branches." Likewise, when wishing to communicate that Israelites who are not Christians are no longer members of God's people, this too is expressed in metaphor: they have been "broken off." Such metaphors are labeled "dead"; that is, they no longer function as if metaphorical inferences, but rather as if plain speech.⁵

For the first recipients of Romans, the imagery presented here offered a new way of interpreting reality. But it has functioned in the history of the church as if familiar and self-evident information, as if confirming reality. And it has done so often without focusing on the

or action by substituting a word or expression that denotes a different thing, idea, or action, often a word from a visual image or sound, suggesting a shared quality between the two words or expressions that remains at an imaginary level.

³ The history of this concept is traced in Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire, 135-425* (transl. H. McKeating; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁴ For the history of this concept, see Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (SNTSM 10; London: Cambridge University Press, 1969). The other text most often pressed into service to support this notion is Gal 6:16, where reference is made to the Israel of God. That case is equally vague, failing to supply the referent, and with grammatical ambiguity built into the statement, as Richardson has demonstrated. Based on my work on Galatians (Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* ([Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002]), if Paul was referring to them as Israel, it would undermine Paul's effort to persuade his audience to remain non-Israelites by resisting the offer of proselyte conversion to resolve their identity problems. Paul emphasizes that God has included them by way of Christ into Abraham's family, but he does not declare them to be members of the family of Israel. Rather, it is likely that Paul is reflecting a sentiment not unlike that expressed in Romans 11 toward his fellow empirical Israelites, looking for a day when there will be peace among them, rather than division, such as is now the case in Galatia and Rome over the proposition of the gospel of Christ and its implications for the admission of members from the nations into the family of Abraham apart from proselyte conversion. Following his divisive rhetoric focused so singly upon the identity needs of the non-Israelites addressed, including many negative comparative statements about his fellow Israelites and their positions, even curse wishes, such a gesture of hoped for peace is not hard to imagine in his parting words, from which his audience can also learn something about the generosity that they should hold out to those by whom they are now being marginalized, an aspect so evident in Romans 11, but that has not been expressed in the argument of Galatians. Perhaps Paul realized the danger of the thrust of his rhetoric by the time he has reached the conclusion, and seeks to mitigate the effect. See also Susan Eastman, "Israel and Divine Mercy in Galatians," [in this volume, pp. ???]

⁵ A metaphor that passes unnoticed as metaphorical, becoming familiar from common usage so that it seems to describe rather than allude to the thing for which it substitutes, such as will be discussed herein for the common arguments made by way of stating that Gentiles are being "grafted in" to Israel, or Israelites are being "cut off," is called a dead metaphor.

particular aspect that was initially central to it: the confrontation of Christ-believing non-Israelites' pride toward Israelites who do not share their convictions about the meaning of Christ. Rather than serving to reinterpret reality, this allegory is repeated as if reflecting reality, as if the metaphorical language describes what came to pass, what is, and what will be in terms of social reality, without regard for the limitations of metaphorical communication.⁶

Although it is regularly maintained that the broken branches refers to Israelites who are removed from the tree that is Israel, Paul does not write that the tree is Israel. And he has just written, also in allegorical terms, that these Israelites have not fallen, but only stumbled, missing a step. The allegorical sense of walking or running implied for one who trips does not represent an identifiable entity that stands for Israel, but instead implies that these Israelites suffer impeded progress within some situation that involves pursuit of a future goal, such as the hope of the age to come, or of the rule and protection of God. Moreover, in both allegories it is only some Israelites Paul seeks to represent, making it unlikely that it is Israel per se that is in view, but rather, some entity more all encompassing than Israel. That entity will include both the return of some of these Israelites to walking unimpeded or standing securely, or to the tree or supporting branch in which the rest of the Israelites continue to partake, alongside of which the members from the rest of the nations have joined them.

The mystery revealed in the metaphorical language of vv. 25-27 also describes a process that will result in a future state of restoration, rather than that any kind of end point has been reached already, such as broken off branches implies. When it comes to conceptualizing Paul's view of and expectations for Israel and its non-Christ-believing Israelites, has Paul's olive tree allegory led interpreters awry?

EXEGETICAL REFLECTIONS ON 11:11-24

It is important to focus attention on what Paul wants the members from the nations he addresses here in Romans to understand, and how he wants them to "therefore" think and behave. We will start our investigation with vv. 11-15, where an initial allegory of stumbling is introduced, then discuss the tree allegory of vv. 16-24, discussing the language that follows in the rest of the chapter along the way. There are many interpretive decisions to make among available options, and the choices one makes have a profound impact upon the discourse and relations that follow from it, including if not especially on Christian discourse about and relations with Jews and Judaism, indeed, with empirical Israel and Israelites today.

The Stumbling Allegory of 11:11-16

11:11: Paul begins this section by introducing the first of three allegories, in which some have "stumbled" or "tripped": "have they not stumbled [ἔπταισαν] in order that they would fall [πέσωσιν]?"⁷ It is not clear if this allegory is of a race or competitive event, although it seems that tripping takes place while pursuing some course, either by walking or running. To the degree that Paul draws this imagery from Isaiah, which seems likely based on the sources he cites, it is not based on visualizing a competitive athletic event.

⁶ The role of this allegory to describe non-Christian Jews and Judaism being replaced by the church rather than to describe the precarious place and responsibility of non-Jewish Christians, brings into question whether this allegory successfully communicated Paul's stated aims for it even for the original audience.

⁷ Note the subjunctive of πίπτω.

The stumbling allegory follows Paul's citation of Psalm 69:22-23 in vv. 9-10, where the language of tripping is used (σκάνδαλον), which Paul preceded in v. 8 with the citation of Isa 29:10 (cf. Deut 29:4). It also reaches back to language introduced earlier in chapters 9–10, and that follows in 11:25-27, where Isa 59:20-21⁸ and 27:9⁹ are cited, and in 14:1–15:13, in the instructions to the "strong"/"able" about the respect they should show to the "weak"/"stumbling."¹⁰ In 9:30-33, Paul drew from Isa 28:16, wherein it is written that God will build in Zion a stone tower upon a precious cornerstone in which Israel is to take refuge, thereby trusting in the Lord's provision to avoid the flooding that will engulf those who *stumble* in judgment (i.e., Judahites who seek to go to war in league with the Israelites who are resisting the Assyrians), who march but *fall* (πέσωσιν) backward, failing to listen to the word of the Lord (28:7, 12-13, 17).¹¹ Paul coupled this with Isa 8:14-15, wherein the Assyrians represent the flood waters (vv. 6-8), and the stone upon which the building for protection is based became a stone over which some instead *stumble*. The issue appears to be whether the people of Judah will take refuge in the promise of God to protect them from the threat of the Assyrians. The stone over which they trip is not defined when Paul takes up the imagery in Romans 9–11 (or in chs. 14–15); in the context it could signal either trust in Jesus as the Messiah, or even more specifically, trust in Jesus as the one to proclaim as the Savior of the nations, the task that it is Israel's responsibility and privilege to undertake.¹² This second dimension presumes trust in Christ as the one in whom to take refuge, but emphasizes, just as does Isaiah 40–66, the topic of proclamation by the heralds from Israel to the nations, which

⁸ Note that in Isa 59:8-10, it is walking as if there is not sufficient light to guide one's step, such as when the blind touch a wall in order to find their way, and the context is the paths of righteousness on which the Lord will guide those who return from exile across the desert to Jerusalem, which is a theme throughout Isaiah (cf. 27:12-13; chs. 40ff.: passim).

⁹ The announcement in Isaiah 27 appears to be to those from Israel who have been exiled by the Assyrians (vv. 12-13), and not simply an announcement to the members of the other nations per se. It is worth pondering whether Paul is similarly concerned in Romans 9–11 with the regathering of the dispersed of Israel among the nations (cf. 9:25-26, citing Hosea 2:23; 1:10), and not simply with members from the other nations, to which he also turns. From Paul's perspective, some of his fellow Israelites are tripping over this task. The idea that Paul is reaching out to his fellow Israelites first in each location as part of his strategy before turning to the Gentiles, is explored in the concept of Paul's "two-step" pattern in Nanos, *Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 239-88.

¹⁰ On the imagery of stumbling in Romans 14–15, see Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 119-65, where it is argued that at issue is the same topic as in chs. 9–11, namely, the present "ability" to believe in Jesus Christ or not, which is portrayed as stumbling or growing weak in faith, but not as unfaith.

¹¹ Paul appears to be reflecting on Isa 27–29, which is full of agricultural imagery, throughout chs. 9–11. In addition to the texts from Isa 28 mentioned, he cites Isa 29:16 in 9:20, about the clay having no right to question the potter. He draws on Isa 28:22 in 9:28. In 10:11 he again uses Isa 28:16, upon the heels of its use in 9:33. Just before the start of the stumbling and tree allegories, in 11:8, Isa 29:10 is one of the several verses cited to explain that God has caused some of Israel to be unable to see or hear. He uses 27:9 coupled with 59:20-21 (a chapter also full of agricultural metaphors) as the proof for his argument that all Israel will be restored in 11:26-27. The theme of mercy being extended to those of Israel not persuaded, because mercy has been shown to those of the nations not persuaded (11:30-32; note), may reverse the notion that could arise from Isa 27:10-11, that the dry and broken boughs on which the calves graze and from which fires are made, which are analogized to the people without understanding, will be denied compassion and mercy (ἐλεήσει).

¹² Cf. Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 142-48.

Paul introduced in chapter 9,¹³ and described throughout chapters 10 and 11:1-10, leading up to the stumbling allegory of verses 11-15.¹⁴

The question of whether these Israelites have "fallen" may well be traced at least back to the assertion in 9:6 that "it is not such that the word of God has *fallen* [ἐκπέπτωκεν]," a connection easily missed when translated "failed," as it generally is.¹⁵ Paul's assertion that the word of God has not fallen follows Paul's expression of deep concern for the fate of his fellow Israelites, and a catalog of the privileges of these Israelites that remains true for them regardless of their present standing concerning the proclamation of the Christ, also an Israelite.¹⁶ Although the imagery is different, and revolves around a wine vineyard rather than an olive tree, Isa 27:7 similarly asks whether the punishment of Israelites signals their

¹³ In 9:17, even Pharaoh's hardening is noted not to observe Pharaoh's fate or discuss salvation, but for its role in raising up Israel in order that God's name will be proclaimed to the nations!

¹⁴ The "works" at issue suddenly in 11:6 do not seem to be about works-righteousness or ethnic privilege, but rather the work of proclamation, Israel's special calling to the nations. The point is that God's choice is not based on whether Israelites were faithfully proclaiming or not, but a prior choice of God ("grace"), so that it is not punishment, but fulfilling a plan of God's design that sets the remnant apart from the rest who are stumbling presently. Yet Paul also writes of failure to be faithful or persuaded in this argument as the cause, and also that, if they become faithful again, they will be restored (cf. 10:3; 11:23, 30-32)—so Paul seems to want it both ways. It also seems at some points in the argument that at issue is not whether the rest of the Israelites were proclaiming, but that they were doing it for the wrong reason, to make plain their own special role for God, rather than focusing on God's using them to declare his own righteousness to the nations (10:2-3), an element of self-identity over which they were tripping (9:30-33). But how then can Paul also say it is not on the basis of behavior that the separation of the remnant from the rest turns? And how does he know what the motives of other Israelites are or are not? He can only know whether they agree with him about the nature of the message to proclaim, around which revolves his disagreement with other Israelites. It is also interesting to note that what is faulted among Israelites, seeking to establish their own righteousness, however interpreted, is at the same time attributed to be God's motive (cf. 11:30-36), thus without recognition that what some Israelites are accused of would be a natural expression of being in the image of God. How inappropriate can it be, if God is supposed to be similarly motivated?

¹⁵ Most translations have *failed*, but the concept of *falling* is carried in this cognate of πίπτω.

¹⁶ Paul's next clause, in 9:6, has been the subject of much discussion, and important especially to replacement theology. The traditional translation is, "For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel [οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ οὗτοι Ἰσραήλ]" (NRSV), but it seems that Paul should be asserting instead that even though some of his Israelite brothers and sisters are stumbling, to them belongs the title Israel, and all the gifts that go with that calling, as he eventually affirms in 11:25, and in 11:28-29, as irrevocably so, because of the promises made to their fathers. In other words, one would have expected him to argue just what he does argue in our verse in 11:11, that some Israelites, even most, might be stumbling presently, but they have most certainly *NOT* fallen. It is possible to read Paul as coming back to this initial follow-up to the declaration that God's word has not fallen although some Israelites have, as the traditional reading of 9:6 suggests, in order finally to undermine it, as if, for example, it represented the view of his dialogue partner, but not Paul's viewpoint. Or, it is possible to read 9:6 differently, as an assertion that begs the question: "For are not all these Israel, who are from Israel?" (cf. Klaus Wengst, "First to the Jews and also to the Greeks: A Clearing through the Letter to the Romans," accessed on July 8, 2008 at <<http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=2974>>: "Are not all out of Israel, 'Israel'?). Such a question would follow naturally from the assertion in 9:2-5 of the continued gifts and calling of God to these Israelites regardless of their present problematic state. The answer is yes, they are, but they do not all properly represent Israel presently, but in the end they will. Just as all of Abraham's seed are his children, yet there are distinctions among them (v. 7), so too all descendants of Israel are Israelites, but there are distinctions among them. The purpose for this line of argument is to assure the non-Israelites addressed in Rome that they are not to develop their self-understanding of their identity as equal co-participants from the non-Christ-believing Israelites, whom Paul regards to be presently in error, but from those who, like Paul, are included in the Jewish communal subgroup of Christ-belief; see Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, and idem, "The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 283-304.

destruction: "Has he struck them down as he struck down those who struck them? Or have they been killed as their killers were killed?" (NRSV). The answer given in Isa 27:9 ("Therefore by this the guilt of Jacob will be expiated, and this will be the full fruit of the removal of his sin"; NRSV), Paul cites in 11:26-27, to prove that Israel's stumbling will not result in its fall, but rather all Israel will be restored once the time of the discipline of some Israelites, those who failed to take refuge from the coming storm, i.e., the attack of the nations, is complete. Thus, although Paul develops the allegories from Isaiah 27 in different ways, he appears to get his inspiration for the stumbling motif from there, as well as the transition to the plant allegory in the argument that follows, which is not confined to Isa 27, or even chapter 59, which Paul conflates with 27:9 in Romans 11:26-27.¹⁷

The members of the other nations are declared to receive *salvation* as a *result of some* Israelites *missing a step, tripping, or stumbling*.¹⁸ The outcomes for these Israelites and the members of the other nations are inextricably linked. The Israelites who have missed a step are presented to have stumbled, but that they have fallen is unmistakably denied: "*May it never be!*" It is important to keep in focus that *Israel* is not presented to have stumbled. Rather, some Israelites have missed a step; other Israelites are still running or walking, i.e., successfully trusting God on the matter at hand. The existence of the remnant of Israel draws on the argument from the preceding verses (cf. 11:1-2, 5, 7), is central to this argument, and to the following allegory and arguments.

The misstep of some is presented to be for the *gain* of the nations, resulting in their restoration (σωτηρία): "but their misstep is for the salvation of the nations...." That these outcomes are related is asserted, but why a negative development for one party is related to a positive development for the other one is not explained. Paul likely draws on the idea of Israel as the servant who will bring restoration to all of humanity, even when some of her children are being disciplined.

It is unclear to whom the next clause, "... to make them jealous," refers. In prevailing translations and commentaries, it is understood to refer to those missing a step, and to signify that the stumbling Israelites are being provoked in the sense of being made envious, and moreover, that they will conclude that these non-Israelites have something that they do not have. Thus, paradoxically, these Israelites (often "Israel," as if Paul has not just written that it is only *some* of Israel who are stumbling) benefit by being made *jealous* when *salvation* comes thereby *to the nations*.¹⁹ However, if it refers to making these Israelites jealous, and since Paul writes of provoking to jealousy/emulation (παραζηλώσαι), and not to envy/begrudging (φθόνος), the emphasis should be on these Israelites being provoked to reestablish their right relationship with God's purpose (as envisaged by Paul), and not in terms of seeking to deny entrance to non-Israelites, a motive that would be described instead as envy or begrudging,

¹⁷ Note that it is the "fruit" of their sins at issue in 27:9, so that the imagery from trees/plants is invoked metaphorically. The kind of fate that humans are described as suffering—being judged and disciplined but not destroyed, and similar concerns throughout—align with the imagery of the tree as suffering damage and yet not destroyed, a theme throughout Isaiah (cf. Kirsten Nielsen, *There is Hope for a Tree: The Tree as Metaphor in Isaiah* [JSOTSupS 65; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989; Original Danish: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, Copenhagen, 1985], 71, passim; Job 14:7).

¹⁸ Παραπτώματι is often translated "transgression" (NASB), but this obscures the metaphorical language of motion at play here, and the idea the word carries in general of misstep (cf. *L&S*, p. 1322), while the translation "fall" (KJV, ASV), completely undermines the point being made: the denial of just that outcome. See Klaus Haacker "Das Thema von Römer 9-11 als Problem der Auslegungsgeschichte," [in this volume...???

¹⁹ No benefit to those Israelites not missing a step is noted.

φθόνος.²⁰ The picture would be of some Israelites stumbling, and while out of balance, watching others suddenly pursuing righteousness (9:30: "since the nations, which did not pursue righteousness have attained righteousness, but from the faith [in Christ, or, the faithfulness {of Christ}]"), which makes these Israelites jealous.

In the traditional view, these Israelites are supposed to be jealous of the Gentile Christ-believers. That would echo Rom 10:19, which draws from Deut 32:21, the song of Moses, wherein Israel is told that it is to be made jealous (παραζηλώσω) by those who are not a nation, in retaliation for having made God jealous by way of idolatry. As stated in Deut 32, this provocation to jealousy has a negative valence, yet it is not synonymous with begrudging, but rather, with being provoked to get back on course, that is, to honoring Israel's God only. But it is not clear that it is jealousy of the Gentiles to which Paul points. It may be the stumbling Israelites will be provoked to jealousy by the Israelites succeeding among the nations. If the Israelites in question see Paul and the remnant succeeding with the proclamation to the nations apart from themselves, it will make them want to emulate the remnant's behavior (see discussion of v. 13 below). It will challenge them positively to want to regain their footing to complete the pursuit of God's righteousness, to which the Torah points, but now with the recognition that this is attained by way of faithfulness to the proclamation of Christ.

In addition to not being clear of whom the stumbling Israelites are to be jealous, the traditional understanding that it is stumbling Israelites who will be provoked to jealousy in 11:11 is also not clear, although that is the topic of v. 13, to be discussed.²¹ Here, it would make sense to understand the ones being provoked to jealousy of Israel by the stumbling of some, and yet God's continued extension of grace to them, to be the non-Israelites (cf. *T. Zeb.* 9.8).²² When members of the nations see some Israelites stumbling, then some of these non-Israelites will recognize their chance to join those who are standing strong. Even though they had not been pursuing God's righteousness and justice for humankind, as had been Israelites, they would be described as thereby getting a chance to join in this pursuit, because they now are provoked to emulate those of Israel who are not stumbling (the remnant which has announced this good news to them). If understood in this way, this offers some explanation for why Israel's stumbling is for the gain of the nations; otherwise, the logic behind the stumbling of some Israelites in order for the non-Israelites to become co-participants is not provided.

Note that Paul's questions and answers are in the style of diatribe: he engages an imaginary interlocutor. The question that arises in v. 11 is a reaction to the argument preceding it, which cites several texts (Deut 29:4;²³ Ps 68:22-23 LXX) to proclaim what appears to be a continuous state of insensitivity and alienation among these stumbling Israelites. The answer unambiguously declares that this does not represent falling, as in being cut off, but rather a temporary state, tripping, from which one can recover one's footing. This rhetorical

²⁰ Cf. Mark D. Nanos, "'O Foolish Galatians, Who has Cast the Evil Eye [of Envy] Upon You?' (Gal 3:1a-b): The Belief System and Interpretive Implications of Paul's Accusation" (available at <<http://www.marknanos.com/projects.html>>), 1999; cf. Stowers, *Rereading*, 305.

²¹ NRSV translates the last clause: "so as to make *Israel* jealous," but the Greek text only has the pronoun "αὐτούς," rightly translated "them" in KJV and NASV.

²² Although Paul mixes masculine αὐτούς and neuter ἔθνεσιν in ἡ σωτηρία τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εἰς τὸ παραζηλώσαι αὐτούς, he similarly mixes these two genders when referring to Gentiles in 2:14-15 (I am grateful to Andy Johnson for pointing out this parallel).

²³ Note that in Deut 29:4, the day is a sign of a changed fortune, that the lack of heart or seeing or hearing aright during the former events, capacities that God had not yet given to them, has now come to an end on "this day"; from now on they will perceive fully, if they but obey all the words of the covenant.

device can make it uncertain at points whether Paul is expressing his viewpoint, or one that he seeks to challenge. But it also suggests a certain logical progression should be traceable in the argument.

11:12: The Christ-believing of the nations will receive all the more *riches* when the *fullness* (*success*) arrives for the some Israelites who are presently missing a step. The word ἥττημα carries more the sense of lack of comparative success (being less, weaker, inferior) and dishonor, rather than outright failure,²⁴ so it keeps the temporary state of those stumbling in view, rather than alluding to them as having fallen. It is asserted that the temporary stumbling of some will *benefit* the *nations all the more* when "their *fullness*" arrives, which signals their success, relative strength, or restored honor rating. Otherwise, one might logically conclude that their continued misfortune would be in the best interests of the nations, which is at the heart of the presumption he will challenge in the tree allegory that follows. But Paul asserts that everyone—the whole *kosmos*— will benefit when this temporary state of suffering is over.

11:13-15: That Paul is specifically addressing Christ-believing non-Israelites in this argument, which is otherwise clear throughout this section in many turns of phrase and pronoun choices, is made explicit in v. 13: "Now I am speaking to you members of the nations." They are the encoded audience, regardless of whether there may be Israelites also among the audience (which seems highly likely, although how many and in what proportions remain anyone's guess).

It is imperative to Paul that these non-Israelites realize that Paul *magnifies his service* to the *nations*. He does this specifically "to provoke the some" *missing a step* "to jealousy," that is, to "emulation." As discussed above, this is different than envy or begrudging. And it is not about being provoked by seeing the nations brought in, as if that signaled they were themselves being replaced—which is precisely the kind of thinking that he will immediately confront. Rather, it is about Paul's own ministry that the stumbling are to be provoked to compare themselves.²⁵ Paul expects his fellow Israelites to recognize that their own privilege of declaring God's righteousness to the nations is being embodied successfully in Paul's ministry, not their own, and they will thus be stimulated to rethink Paul's message, and then join him in declaring it to the nations. The theme of proclamation of the news of good continues to be front and center in Paul's explanation of the present state of some of his fellow Israelites, those who have not yet been chosen to carry out this task, and the eventual state to which he seeks to restore them by way of their recognition of their own aspirations expressed in his success among the nations.

Although Paul's ministry may not appear to be directed to Israelites, his non-Israelite audience is informed that Paul's service to the nations is *not ultimately just for the benefit of the nations (i.e., themselves), but also for the benefit of the Israelites who have been stumbling*. The nations are important, Paul is their servant, yet their success is *not his only aim*, but a *part of a larger program* aimed at bringing about the *success* of those who are *stumbling*. It may not be readily apparent or logical based on the advantage that the members of the nations have received by way of the temporary stumbling of some Israelites, but it is actually in the best interests of the nations to seek the welfare of these Israelites, rather than to wish for or perpetuate their

²⁴ Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 2.557, although to a different conclusion.

²⁵ Cf. Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 247-51; Idem, "Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience," 300-4.

disadvantaged condition. Paul argues that this will be *all the better* for the nations (for themselves), as much better as is "life from the dead" compared to "reconciliation." Paul argues not from a negative outcome to a positive one, but from a positive outcome to an even better one.

Paul's approach here could be and probably was calculated to be insulting, for it implies, if not states, that they are being used in Paul's effort to achieve goals that are (at least significantly) beyond themselves, but on behalf of his fellow Israelites—to whom they are tempted to see themselves as superior (see below). This concept and language echoes Isaiah's descriptions of using the nations to chastise Israel, but that this role must nevertheless not be mistaken for replacing Israel, or even ultimately for their own blessing. They are tools in God's hand to chastise Israel, but the remnant from the nations among whom they have been scattered and exiled will be gathered and restored, and the nations (e.g., Assyria, Babylon) will be punished for their own mistaken presumptuousness toward God and Israel (e.g., Isa 10–11), often defined similarly as "high" or "lofty" ideas about themselves [ὑψος; ὑψηλός; ὕβρις], and delivered in tree metaphors (e.g., 10:12, 33; counterpoint in 11:1, 10; cf. 2:12–13). The parallels are not precise, for these Christ-believers are now members of the people of God, but the allusion is apposite, and the warning serious: in the allegory that follows the Christ-believers from the nations face the threat of being "cut off" if they do not arrest their arrogance toward the Israelites suffering discipline.

In sharp contrast to the "New Perspective" proposition that Paul is against maintaining ethnic identity as meaningful,²⁶ Paul's continued ethnic identity is played up rather than devalued. Paul's identity as a Christ-believing *Israelite* separates him into a "we" group with these Israelites that the audience does not share as "we," but rather as "them," members from the nations other than Israel. Paul pulls no punches on this ethnic identification with Israelites (cf. 9:2–5; 11:1–2), and thus dissociation from those from other nations. He seeks to create a new sense of "we-ness" that encompasses non-Christ-believing Israelites within the "we" who stand in need of and can expect to receive the mercy that comes from being part of the family of the God of patient mildness as well as abrupt severity, a shared identification that is larger than either Christ/not-Christ or the nations/Israel boundary lines. This implies that Paul regards these non-Christ-believing Israelites to be "brethren" in a significant way that even Christ-believing members from the other nations are not, including in terms of an ultimate shared fate.

A central element of this theme is that some Israelites are, according to Paul, more concerned to demonstrate the righteousness of Israel to the nations rather than with God using righteous Israel to gather in the nations as co-participants in the people of God apart from becoming members of Israel (cf. chs 9–10). He concludes this because, from Paul's vantage point, all who are being faithful recognize the goal of the righteousness upheld by Torah is Christ, and thus faith in Christ, and making Christ known to all the nations.²⁷ Thus God

²⁶ As exemplified repeatedly in comments on this section by James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC 38b; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), e.g., 2.684–85, 693–96; N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 10; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 395–770, e.g., 681–82, 692.

²⁷ In 10:4, Paul writes, "For Christ is the goal of Torah for righteousness/justice for everyone who is being faithful [παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι]." This statement arises in the context of explaining that some Israelites are not being obedient to the righteousness of God, because they are seeking to establish their own righteousness or justice (i.e., for Israel, versus as chosen on behalf of the righteousness/justice of God for all humankind) (10:3). Thus, according to Paul, some Israelites are being jealous for God in the wrong way (10:2), in ignorance that the righteousness/justice of God is pointing to the inclusion in Christ of members from the other nations alongside of Israelites, without discrimination of status according to whether they are Israelites or non-Israelites, an equality

will cause some Israelites to stumble over the proclamation of the meaning of Christ for the nations. Those non-Israelites who do respond to the message of Christ announced by some Israelites such as Paul, will be the source of provoking the stumbling Israelites to jealousy, that is, to emulation of the choice of these members of the nations to be zealous to uphold above all else the justice (righteousness) of God's plan for the reconciliation of the world.

The theme of the proclamation of the message of good, Israel's special privilege and responsibility, remains central. In Paul's argument, the remnant of Israel is faithfully carrying out this charge, the rest are stumbling over its execution by way of the message of Christ to the nations apart from the members of the nations joining Israel, the righteous nation. But the ultimate goal includes the welfare of all Israel, as well as the faithful from the nations.

11:16: It is easy to overlook that between the stumbling and the tree allegories, Paul briefly introduces another allegory that he does not develop. *If the first part (ἀπαρχή) is holy, also the lump of dough (φύραμα) [is holy].* In other words, if the initial portion of flour or starter dough was properly dedicated, then the lump of dough the rest of the flour is used to make is dedicated. If drawing on Num 15:17-21, that a cake from the first of the dough is offered, that means the rest can be served to others who are profane. In Lev 23:14, note that offering the first of the dough makes holy the rest of the dough made from it. Yet Paul uses this metaphor differently, extending the holiness from the portion offered first to the entire entity.²⁸ It is possible that Paul is alluding to the starter dough that is kept back when baking bread, so that the next batch of dough can be created.²⁹

Whatever the precise imagery, the allegory suggests that Paul is communicating that the whole is identified with the parts, and likely, is appealing to the role of the remnant of Christ-believing Israelites on behalf of Israelites presently unfaithful to the proposition of the gospel: they are sanctified. Paul continues the thought of the previous verses, that the remnant Israelites, among whom he counts himself, recognize that that they are chosen at the expense of their brethren, and they are in anguish about the present suffering state of the rest. His ministry is on their behalf, and if successful among the nations, will result in their restoration.

Paul is set apart for the good of the whole, for its protection, not its condemnation, a point he is about to emphasize with his non-Israelite target audience. Things are not as they appear to be to them; instead, even those presently missing a step have been set apart to God's purpose. One might be reminded here of Paul's earlier point, that even Pharaoh was set apart to be used by God specifically in order to further the proclamation of his name (9:17, citing Exod 9:16); all the more so are all Israelites set apart to God's special purpose for Israel as promised to the fathers, as Paul will go on to claim with emphasis in the rest of the chapter.

In this transitional verse, Paul also introduces the third allegory, which is of a vine or tree: *if the root is holy, even so are the branches (or shoots).* One important point for theological reflection is how one defines the root. Usually understood to be Israel (Jewett), some early

of access to being declared among the righteous ones which must now be recognized to be a present reality (10:8-12). It must not be overlooked that Paul's stated goal is to provoke such fellow Israelites back on track, to restoration (10:1) to their rightful role as heralds of the nations (10:14-11:15).

²⁸ David E. Aune, "Distinct Lexical Meanings of ΑΠΑΡΧΗ in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (eds. John T. Fitzgerald, et al.; Supplements to Novum Testamentum 110; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), 119-25 (121-22).

²⁹ Daniel Stramara's suggestion to me in discussion.

commentators point to Christ as the root, others to the remnant,³⁰ and others to the patriarchs.³¹ Paul does not say. Perhaps it is not relevant to a proper interpretation of this allegory?

The Olive Tree Allegory of 11:17-24

Just as Paul's stumbling allegory probably drew upon the imagery in Isaiah, so too Paul's olive tree allegory is likely derived from his extensive use of Isaiah throughout this section and the letter.³² Isa 27:2-6 likely reflects the post-Exilic conflicts between Jews and Samaritans, and contains not only a promise of hope, but also a warning of judgment to those who grow up among his vines like thorns and briars, that is, a warning to the Samaritans, if they behave like enemies of God's purposes with his own Judahite children³³ --which is similar to the warning Paul seeks to deliver to the non-Israelites among his Jewish kinsmen in Rome! Note also in the introduction of Isaiah 27 (MT) that branches are presently being destroyed (27:10-11), and dried out branches gathered.³⁴ Although in Rom 11:27 Paul does not cite all of Isa 27:9, cognates of ἐκκόπτω are employed; in other words, the "cutting down" imagery is made explicit there. In Isa 27:6, just before the question of v. 7, Isaiah introduces the imagery of the Lord's plant filling the world with its shoots and fruit, although in the context more likely referring to a grape vine than an olive tree.³⁵

The imagery of trees and plants is of course not confined to Isaiah, but found throughout the Tanakh, and is a central theme developed in Second Temple Jewish literature, including in the Dead Sea Scrolls.³⁶ Paul draws from Hosea (1:10; 2:23) for several citations in Romans 9:25-27, and Hosea 14:1-9 (LXX 14:2-10) refers to Israel as a fruitful olive tree (ἐλαία), among the plant images invoked (also lily, cedar), refers to her "branches" (κλάδοι) spreading, and also speaks of her "being weak" or "stumbling" in terms that Paul uses in Romans 14:1-15:7 (ἀσθενέω). In Jeremiah 11:16, Israel is called a beautiful, fruitful olive tree, but one whose branches will be damaged (ἠχρεώθησαν) for the evil it has done (v. 17).³⁷ Job 14:7-9 is also suggestive, wherein the theme of hope for a tree arises, for even after it has been cut down and

³⁰ This was the position I took in *Mystery of Romans*, but I am reconsidering it in light of the present research.

³¹ Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 614; Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.564-65; Myles M. Bourke, *A Study of the Metaphor of the Olive Tree in Romans XI* (The Catholic University of America Studies in Sacred Theology 2nd Ser. 3; Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 65-111.

³² For fuller discussions of the intertextual elements, see Florian Wilk, *Die Bedeutung des Jesajabuches für Paulus* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998); J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul "In Concert" in the Letter to the Romans* (NovTSup 101; Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 2002).

³³ Cf. Nielson, *There is Hope for a Tree*, 120-22.

³⁴ There are significant differences between the MT and LXX descriptions here, with the MT developing the idea of the branches being stripped by the cattle and gathered to burn by the women, while the LXX refers to the cattle resting in the pastures after the trees used in idolatry are cut down (v. 9).

³⁵ Cf. Nielson, *There is Hope for a Tree*, 119.

³⁶ Paul Swarup, *The Self-Understanding of the Dead Sea scrolls Community: An Eternal Planting, A House of Holiness* (Library of Second Temple Studies 59; London and New York: T & T Clark, 2006), traces many of these developments, and demonstrates how the DSS community sees itself as the "eternal planting." This contains the idea of being the righteous remnant, one that lives on behalf of bringing righteousness to the nations. The imagery of plants is linked with the concept of Eden, the prototype of God's sanctuary, and new creation.

³⁷ Cf. Men. 53b, where in a paraphrase of Jer 11:15-16, "Israel is like an olive tree: its product comes after pressure and crushing; even so will Israel's salvation come after its suffering" (Louis Ginzberg, ed., *The Legends of the Jews* [Philadelphia: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998], 6.397-98).

dried out, when water is introduced, it can sprout again. This theme of the vitality of the tree is evident throughout Isaiah.³⁸ In Isa 11:1, 10, which Paul cites in Rom 15:12, the shoot of Jesse sprouts from the stump; Isa 27:2-6 (Paul cites v. 9 in 11:27) refers to a time when "Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit" [NRSV]; and Isa 6:13 discloses that the seeds will sprout from the stump of the tree after it is felled. Moreover, the gathering of olives on high limbs involves striking the tree, which makes it a suitable image for judgment, whether of Israel, some Israelites, or the nations (Isa 17:6; 24:13).

11:17: After relating that "some of the branches have been broken," the target audience is identified to be "you, *being a wild olive which has been grafted in among them.*" Note the shift to singular, and the direct address to this wild olive (ἀγριέλαιος): "you [σύ]."³⁹ The rest of the allegory will develop around this diatribe feature.

The singularity of the you/wild olive is surprising in several ways, not least that it does not support and likely intentionally undermines the idea that there are many non-Israelites in this situation, or that they are in the dominant position in Paul's groups.⁴⁰ He stereotypes them as one olive, denying to them as a group any variety. In social identity terms, Paul arguably expresses the stereotyping perspective of an insider toward the outsider, one who lumps together the outgroup (non-Israelites), but recognizes among his own ingroup (Israelites) rich diversity.⁴¹ That is a long way from the eventual use of Paul to stereotype Jews and Judaism in monolithic, negative terms.

Although normally translated "broken off," it is not actually clear that by using ἐξεκλάσθησαν to describe the state of some Israelites, that Paul has in view "have been broken off," or "pruned." The relatively rare verb ἐκκλάω can and often does signify breaking off. Yet in some cases ἐκκλάω indicates just broken, as in *dislocated*. Liddell and Scott includes for ἐκκλάω in the passive, "to grow weak" or "to be enfeebled," which could certainly be applied to the branches in question.⁴² In Lev 1:17, a bird's wings for an offering are to be "broken [ἐκκλάσει]" but "not separated [οὐ διελεῖ]." Pausanias, *Graeciae descriptio* 8.40.2, describes a case when a fighter's toe was "broken" (ἐκκλαῖ), causing him to expire and lose the fight, because "of the pain in his toe [ὑπὸ τοῦ δακτύλου τῆς ὀδύνης]" (Loeb; transl. W. H. S. Jones). It is not natural to read this to be "broken off," since he is still feeling pain therein. Thus ἐκκλάω is not always used synonymously with ἐκκόπτω ("to cut off"), a word that Paul does not employ until the topic of severity and threat to the wild branch is pronounced in v. 22 (ἐκκοπήση); before that, in vv. 17, 19, and 20, Paul uses ἐκκλάω. Attention to these details brings up several matters to discuss.

³⁸ Nielson, *There is Hope for a Tree*, 76.

³⁹ Cf. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric*, 363; Jewett, *Romans*, 685.

⁴⁰ This element arguably supports my thesis in *Mystery of Romans* that the Christ-believing Gentiles are meeting in Jewish communities, and thus represent a small audience being addressed directly in the midst of an Israelite synagogue subgroup of the larger Israelite community. In any case, it does not play into the usual later Christian perspective that there are many Christian Gentiles (here, but a branch), and few to no representatives of Israel in the "church" (branches) after the supposed events of the Claudius edict.

⁴¹ Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988). See also the argument of J. Ross Wagner, "Not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles': Mercy to the Nations in Romans 9–11." [in conf. volume, pp. ???]

⁴² Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed.; Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1996), 509.

When Paul turns in vv. 19-21 to challenging the wild olive if it was to suppose that it had supplanted the broken branches in God's favor, the broken branches are still described by ἐκκλάω. But in vv. 22-24, when he turns to threatening the wild olive directly that it will wind up broken off itself if it does turn away from the presumptuousness it has expressed, the verb ἐκκόπτω is introduced. Here Paul begins to threaten with the possible fate of being completely removed, "cut/chopped off," and is often used to communicate violent acts of smiting with weapons, or striking a blow. Unlike κλάω, cognates of κόπτω do arise in Theophrastus to describe the breaking or cutting off of branches, but it is not the term he employs for the technique of pruning related to grafting.

Theophrastus (ca. 370-285bce) wrote two books describing plants, with many details about trees, grafting, and various injuries (like pruning).⁴³ In *Caus. plant.* 1.20.3, the olive tree is described as a weak and delicate tree that suffers from "cudgeling" and "breaking off" (κατακοπτομένη) of its "branches" (θαλλείας). In *Hist. plant.* 4.16.1, he observes that the olive tree becomes all the fairer after being cut all around (περικοπέντα). He differentiates between a cut back (ἐπικόπτοντα) and pruned (διακαθαίρωνται) almond tree (*Caus. plant.* 2.15.3). *Hist. plant.* 4.16.1, refers to cutting off the crown of the tree as ἐπικοπή, which is also used in *Caus. plant.* 5.17.3 to describe "topping", which is said to kill many trees.⁴⁴

However, when Theophrastus wants to describe proper pruning, especially when related to grafting, he usually uses διακαθάρισις and cognates (*Caus. plant.* 3.7.5-12; *Hist. plant.* 2.7.12). That kind of pruning is something healthy (cathartic) for trees, and olive trees are noted for requiring lots of pruning of dead wood, and being rapid sprouters. Proper husbandry provides for a healthy tree (*Caus. plant.* 16.1.2), and he notes that the smaller an olive tree is kept, the better the fruit it will bear (*Hist. plant.* 2.7.1).

I admit that it is probable that the readers will imagine broken off when ἐκκλάω is used as well (the interpretive tradition certainly has), but the possibility should remain open that Paul was exploring a nuance in the construction of the allegory wherein the natural branches were damaged, akin to stumbling, but not cut off, which would equate to falling instead—even if his readers have regularly missed this subtle point. That would be more consistent both with the running allegory's "stumbling" but not "falling," and the language in vv. 25ff., about the process by which all Israel will be restored, to be discussed below.

Maybe Paul did not recognizing this implication of his logic when reversed, since his focus is on making an *a fortiori* case that harm will happen all the more to the non-Israelites if they should take a presumptuous posture, by way of making the point that their position is already more tenuous than that of the Israelites against whom they would be tempted to suppose such things. If nothing else, this nuance might help interpreters keep in view that it is the possible presumptuousness of the non-Israelites that Paul seeks to obviate in no uncertain terms, while presumptuousness is not indicated here to be the problem of the presently unfaithful Israelites, or to be the reason for them being in this predicament. This is a special

⁴³ *De causis plantarum (Caus. plant.)* [Loeb in 3 vols (vol 1 = LCL 471; 2 = 474, 3 = 475)], eds. and transls. Benedict Einarson and George K. K. Link (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976); idem, *Historia plantarum (Hist. plant.)* [Loeb in 2 vols (vol 1 = LCL 70; vol 2 = 79)], ed. and transl. Sir Arthur Hort (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1916). Theophrastus' taxonomical discussions are extremely helpful, yet it must be noted that he employed Attic Greek, thus often his word choices do not reflect the same vocabulary with which Paul worked. He was also concerned with word choices that contributed to his poetic aims.

⁴⁴ "Cutting back" is also called κόλουσις; *Caus. plant.* 5.17.6 for ἐπιβόσκησις, "cropping," as in being eaten down by animals.

problem Paul fears among the members of the nations in Christ in Rome toward Israelites who are not (yet) Christ-believers.

Paul specifically calls the grafted-in olive, which signifies the non-Israelites, to be a wild olive (ἀγριέλαιος), whereas the natural branches, and thus even the ones broken or broken off, have grown on a cultivated olive tree.⁴⁵ It is quite unusual if not unheard of for wild olive branches or shoots or buds to be grafted into a cultivated olive tree. According to Theophrastus, *Caus. plant.* 1.6.10, a cultivated branch or shoot is grafted into a wild olive tree because the scion is better fed from the strong stock, since the grafts hold better to the stronger tree, and this tree attracts more food, making it a finer producer. Its roots have adjusted to the climate and soil without assistance. If reversed, and wild scions are grafted on cultivated stock, the wild crop will improve, but "no fine fruit" will result.⁴⁶ That remains the case to this day. He also explains that it is best to transplant the wild olive trees into the orchard first, then later plant the cultivated trees, from which the buds or twigs will be used for grafting. According to modern genetic research, the cultivated olive (*olea europaea*) and the wild olive (*olea oleaster*) of the Mediterranean basin have the same chromosome number (2n-2x-46), and are interfertile, however, the wild differ in that they have smaller fruit, thinner mesocarp, poorer oil content, and a long juvenile stage accompanied by the appearance of spinescent shoots.⁴⁷ In terms of productivity, one does not graft wild olive cuttings onto cultivated trees, because they do not produce good fruit.

This oleicultural fact raises several questions about Paul's knowledge about the material around which this allegory turns, as well as his intention for the message. Was Paul (and his secretary, Tertius) unfamiliar with the agricultural details, or was he intentionally turning the normal practice upside down in this metaphor in order to make or emphasize a point, all the more intelligible to the degree that his audience could be presumed to know that he was doing so?⁴⁸ Was it already a rhetorical trope with which he was familiar, and could expect his audience to be, but of which later interpreters of this allegory have been and remain unaware? If intentional, it was likely calculated in keeping with the purpose of the passage we have been discussing all along, as several exegetes have noted: Paul seeks to put his non-

⁴⁵ Columella, roughly a contemporary of Paul but from Spain and writing in Latin, refers to the wild olive as *oleaster* (or the diminutive *oleastellum* for small wild olive), and the cultivated olive as *olea*; Lucius Junius Moderatus Columella, *De re rustica* (*Rust.*) [*On Agriculture*; Loeb in 3 vols (vol 1 = LCL 361; vol 2 = 407; vol 3 = 408)], vol. 1 [Books I-IV] ed. and transl. Harrison Boyd Ash (Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press, 1941), vols. 2 [Books V-IX] and 3 [Books X-XII] eds. and transl. E. S. Forster and Edward H. Heffner (Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press, 1968); idem, *De arboribus* (*Arb.*) [*On Trees*; LCL 408], eds. and transl. E. S. Forster and Edward H. Heffner (Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press, 1968). See Daniel Zohary and Maria Hopf, *Domestication of Plants in the Old World: The Origin and Spread of Cultivated Plants in West Asia, Europe, and the Nile Valley* (3rd ed. Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 145-51; cf. Esler, "Ancient Oleiculture and Ethnic Differentiation," 112-13. I am grateful for discussion of olive cultivation and grafting with Kjell Lundquist, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

⁴⁶ Theophrastus, *Caus. plant.* 1.15.3-4, explains that wild trees fail to ripen because their fruit is too abundant, denser, drier, apt to draw the energy to the tree instead, so the stronger group is not always the better for fruit production. In *Hist. plant.* 2.3.1-2, it is noted that cultivated olive may turn into a wild one, but the other direction is rare, and the variation is usually in the fruit rather than the tree. Zohary and Hopf, *Domestication of Plants in the Old World*, 148, explain that some wild olive tree suckers or knobs were valued as stock material to plant in the orchards in order to graft cultivated scions to them, and note that still in western Turkey some wild olive trees are protected in their natural state in order to graft onto them cultivated scions.

⁴⁷ Daniel Zohary, "The Wild Genetic Resources of the Cultivated Olive," *Acta horticulturae* 356 (1994): 62-65.

⁴⁸ How could we conclude decisively either way?

Israelite target audience in their place, so as to dissuade them from presumptuousness.⁴⁹ Common knowledge turned upside down within a metaphor or allegory is especially suited to communicating the unexpected about the matter at hand. If intentionally so in this case, reversing the direction or the grafting is likely intended to reflect how unusual present developments are between Israelites and non-Israelites, and again, just how tenuous is the

⁴⁹ W. D. Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 153-63, notes that Paul uses the idea of them being from a wild tree to put these Gentiles in their place, including to communicate that Jews have advantages over themselves. I am less certain about Davies' argument that Paul chooses the wild olive tree to signify the Gentiles because it implies the inferiority of the Hellenistic culture to the Jewish tradition, or to confront anti-Jewishness in Greco-Roman society. I appreciate the insight in A. G. Baxter and J. A. Ziesler, "Paul and Arboriculture: Romans 11.17-24," *JSNT* 24 (1985): 25-32, that the metaphor is developed to stress God's intention to save Israel, which Paul discusses, but do not agree that the purpose of the grafting here is to revive the tree. The technique is mentioned in Columella, *Rust.* 5.9.16 (and Palladius, *De insitione* 53-54), where a hole is drilled in a cultivated olive tree into which a green slip from a wild tree is placed if failing to produce fruit, in order to make it more productive (noted also by Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.565-66, who notes discussion of this by W. M. Ramsay). Esler observes that this is not called grafting by Columella, it's not about growing of a wild branch from a cultivated tree, and it is not mentioned by Greek authors, or by later Latin authors, so it remains an obscure technique of which Paul was not likely aware (but something like this is mentioned in Philo, *Agriculture* 6, in more general plant terms); moreover, Paul's point turns on the role of the root to sanctify and feed the branch, not the other way around (Esler, "Ancient Oleiculture and Ethnic Differentiation," 119-21). Paul does not draw any point about the tree failing to produce good fruit, and it misses the point that Paul and other Christ-believing Jews represent a healthy fruit-bearing tree, that the holy root makes the branches holy, but with some branches in need of repair, and the overall point of putting the Gentiles in their place if they should regard the non-Christ-believing Jews with disdain, which might follow from the point they make more than be confronted by it. As noted, Theophrastus, *Hist. plant.* 4.16.1, observes that the olive tree becomes all the fairer after being cut all around (περικοπέντα), but does not mention the idea that graft helps the tree itself. Esler, "Ancient Oleiculture and Ethnic Differentiation," 103-24, helpfully observes that Paul reverses the normal procedure of grafting cultivated olive branches onto wild olive trees, which he understands Paul to deliberately subvert to emphasize that these non-Israelites were innately non-productive and required grafting onto Israel in order to bring them down a notch, in keeping with Paul's explicit challenge to entertaining haughty thoughts toward Jews. I am especially grateful for his essay, which prompted me to think about the arboricultural and oleicultural aspects of this allegory more deeply, and to read Theophrastus and Columella in particular in order to do so. Among other things, he made me aware of why Theophrastus, from centuries before Paul, should be privileged over Columella, roughly Paul's contemporary; namely, that the characteristics of Greek olive tree grafting were different than for the Latin West, where they were generally raised in nurseries from planting cuttings or seedlings rather than grafting (116-18; drawing on Lin Foxhall, "Olive Cultivation within Greek and Roman Agriculture: The Ancient Economy Revisited" [Ph.D. dissertation, University of Liverpool, 1990], 335-36, not available to me). I do not agree with Esler, however, that this represents the expression of submerged aspects of Paul's ethnicity and kinship, which I believe Paul consciously and intentionally maintained, including the importance of Torah observance. Instead, I see Paul's argument here as based on just that ethnicity and kinship, which remain central to who he is and to what he understands his Jewish mission and groups to be, expressions of Judaism as it should be, of God's faithfulness to the promises to Israel. He wants his audience to share that viewpoint. The main point, in agreement with Esler, is that the wild branches grafted into the tree sit in it more precariously than do the branches that naturally grew on the tree. That point is made to confront any tendency among the Gentiles to suppose that they are superior to those Jews who have not (yet) joined them in Christ-faith. Along a similar line, Caroline Johnson Hodge, "Olive Trees and Ethnicities: Judeans and Gentiles in Romans 11:17-24," in *Christians as a Religious Minority in a Multicultural City: Modes of Interaction and Identity Formation in Early Imperial Rome*, eds. Jürgen Zangenberg and Michael Labahn (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 77-89; Idem, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 140-47, helpfully emphasizes the use of tree analogies in antiquity to describe kinship lineage and ethnicity, and in this case to establish the hierarchical discrepancy between the Israelite over the non-Israelite branches, and thus the precarious situation of the Gentile's being addressed, even though they are all related to Abrahamic descent by birth (Jews) or adoption in Christ (non-Jews).

place of non-Israelites among the righteous ones of God, like a wild olive grafted to a cultivated olive tree, and how quickly it could change should they fail to keep up their part of the bargain.

Although the NRSV reflects traditional replacement theology, "and you... were grafted *in their place*," the NASV and the KJV are closer to the Greek: "you... were grafted *in among* them [σὺ δὲ ... ἐν αὐτοῖς]." This raises the next questions: *among* "what"/"whom" is it grafted, and "where"?

Note that the wild olive is feminine as well as singular, but it is said to be placed among "*them* [αὐτοῖς]," which is masculine and plural. The nearest antecedent for this pronoun is the broken branches (plural and masculine). If broken off, that would be nonsense, since the grafting is not into branches no longer attached to the root; but if merely broken, as suggested to be possible, then they would be the natural referent. The wild branch, shoot, or bud would be placed among the broken branches. Otherwise, the next antecedent would be the plural and masculine branches which are made holy in v. 16, signifying all the branches. In other words, it is placed among the remaining branches as well as the broken ones, as if they remain on the tree in an impaired state—for all of the branches were declared sanctified by the holy root.⁵⁰

Where was the graft made among these branches? Was the wild olive cutting grafted into the space left where a branch was broken off? That is what the translation "in their place" certainly communicates. There are other ways to graft that do not include pruning branches in order to attach the graft in their place. Note that the wild olive is never explicitly called a branch, but simply a wild olive [ἀγριέλαιος]; it could be a branch, shoot, or bud. And a new slit can be made in the supporting branch or trunk or root into which the shoot or branch or bud is inserted—it need not be made into a pruned branch.⁵¹ But if Paul meant that the wild olive was actually grafted into a place made by a broken off branch, or one of several, it would raise significant problems.

For one, branches to be used to attach a grafted branch are not broken or broken off; they are carefully cut—pruned—in a specific way that prepares for the new branch to be attached, generally along a diagonal slit made in a branch so that the branch to be grafted, also cut along the same angle, can be aligned along the cut line, and then bound together. Paul does not employ any of several terms that refer to the kind of techniques used to prune in order to receive the graft. In handbooks describing grafting techniques to this day, discussions emphasize the quality of the blade and exactness of the kind of cut to be made, which is based upon which kind of graft will be implemented.⁵² However, breaking as well as breaking off branches is a normal, inadvertent byproduct of harvesting olives, because the branches are shaken or raked or beat to release the fruit, as well as picked (cf. Deut 24:20; Isa 17:6; 24:13). It is natural for some branches, especially twigs, to be broken or broken off as the picker moves

⁵⁰ Dunn, *Romans*, 2.661, when discussing this phrase, notes a nuance that is supportive of the concern I seek to raise here: "must obviously mean 'among (the remaining) branches'.... Paul's ambiguity on the point arises out of the fact that he still regards even the broken-off branches as still properly part of, or at least belonging to, the tree." Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.567, does not really discuss the options, but just says it must be the Jewish Christian branches that remain, and not refer to the some branches broken, although "the meaning is imprecisely expressed."

⁵¹ Theophrastus, *Caus. plant.* 1.6.1-10 (esp. 8); cf. Columella, *Rust.* 4.29.1-17; 5.11.1-15; 7.8.1-4; *Arb.* 26.1-9.

⁵² They also discuss the season and timing relative to the waning of the moon; cf. Kjell Lundquist, "Of Grafting," in *Le jardin de plaisir = Der Lust Gartten = Lustgård = The Garden of Pleasure: inledning, kommentarer: Introduction, Commentaries*, ed. A. Mollet, et al. (Uppsala: Gyllene Snittet, 2007), 2.81-85; Theophrastus, *Caus. plant.* 3.7.5-12; Columella, *Rust.* 4.4-5.

within the tree. If one of these branches was then deemed to be appropriate for receiving a grafted branch, it would then require preparing it to do so with a specific cut; grafts are not made into merely broken branches.

Secondly, it does not require cutting several branches to accommodate only one grafted-in branch/bud. Granted, the removal of branches might be done to make room for it, or, for example, to eliminate competitors for the energy the root could provide, or to clear out diseased or dead wood, even because some branch was thriving better than the rest(!).⁵³ But it seems a bit strange if many branches were pruned in order to make room for one wild olive cutting, since it will by definition yield little to no usable fruit. This anomaly is perhaps overlooked in the interpretive tradition because the singularity of the wild olive versus the plurality of the cultivated branches has not generally been discussed or maintained in the interpretations offered.

It should also be noted that Paul refers to κλάδος/οι (branch[es] or shoot[s]), and Theophrastus generally uses κλάδος/οι to refer to branch(es) or twig(s), rather than boughs or main branches (ἀκρεμών), from which they grow (*Hist. plant.* 1.1.9; 1.8.5; 1.10.7).⁵⁴ In other words, Paul does not seem to have in view here the main branches that grow directly from the trunk, which seems to be involved in the usual image of Gentiles being grafted into Israel, with Israel representing the main trunk or tree, but rather he is likely referring to small branches or twigs which grow on the main branches. Israelites are also but branches in the tree sustained by the main branches and trunk. The larger entity in view is more likely simply the people of God, the righteous ones, the descendents of Abraham according to promise. These are themes taken up already in the letter, but he has not stated that these Gentiles have become members of Israel. Rather, his argument has specifically turned on the fact that they are not and do not become Jews, for it is by their acceptance as members of the nations that the oneness of God for all the nations is made manifest (3:27-31).⁵⁵ The Gentiles join Israelites in the worship of the One God (cf. 15:5-12), but they are not Israel, or grafted into Israel.

11:18: The wild olive is *confronted directly not to be arrogant toward the branches. If it is tempted to be arrogant,*⁵⁶ it must *refrain*, and *recognize* that it that it draws its life from the thickness of the root of the cultivated olive tree,⁵⁷ in which it has now become a co-participant (συγκοινωνός). It is but another branch. It is *not the source of its own sustenance, but dependent upon the same root* that the natural branches (including the ones now broken) were already dependent upon. The inference Paul develops is that the wild olive does not stand alone now: a Christ-believing Gentile has not supplanted Israelites, or taken her place; at best, he or she has come in

⁵³ Theophrastus, *Hist. plant.* 2.7.2; *Caus. plant.* 15.1.1-3; 2.15.5-6; 3.7.5-12; 3.14.1-16.3; 5.17.5; cf. Columella, *Arb.* 17.3, for "thriving" example.

⁵⁴ *Hist. plant.* 1.1.9: "I call the 'twig' (κλάδος) the shoot coming as a single whole from these branches, as especially the annual shoot." *Caus. plant.* 5.1.3, refers to twigs/slips (κλώνες), or shoots/ young branches/suckers (πτόρθοι), or boughs/main branches (ἀκρεμόνες), as various ways to name the extremities of trees that contain the starting points capable of sprouting.

⁵⁵ *Mystery of Romans*, 179-92.

⁵⁶ Note middle voice: "do not cause yourself to boast."

⁵⁷ Theophrastus, *Caus. plant.* 6.8.7, uses λίπος for fatty oil of olive trees rather than πύοτις, which Paul uses here. But just a little later in 6.11.6-7, he does use πύοτις several times for fattiness in the root of some fatty trees like pine, and he is talking about the problem of thickening in the root that does not let the rest pass through to feed the part of the tree above ground, something that does not occur in trees with no "oiliness [λιπαρότης] or fattiness [πύοτις]." So it is not quite the same as the oil itself, but the oil in roots. He analogizes the fattiness to fat in animals.

alongside Israelites who are faithful, a faithful Israel that existed already, and that was thriving, and implicitly, among all Israelites, "them."

This feature of the allegory is interesting, not least because, although Theophrastus regarded the root to be the source of the sustenance of the tree branches, and not the other way around (*Caus. plant.* 1.12.1-3), his view is more complicated than that.⁵⁸ He regards the twigs of trees to have the starting points of life in them, witnessed by their ability to sprout when cut off and planted (*Caus. plant.* 1.3-4), and that the bud graft has a sticky fluid (the pure food that is also in the fruit) within it that contributes to its success in taking hold, like coalescing readily with like (*Caus. plant.* 1.6:1-4; 1.12-8-9).⁵⁹ Thus it may not have been so self-evident, in biological terms, that the wild olive need not be put in its place on this matter.

The distress behind the directness of Paul's rebuke is palpable, but the metaphor is ill-fitted to communicating that it is also a benefit in the long run for the broken branches for things to unfold in this manner, as he has asserted via the stumbling allegory, and will again insist upon in the verses following the olive tree allegory; it is also not self-evident why the grafted olive should not relish its gain at their expense.

11:19: The most probable intent of the tree allegory, and to a large degree of this section of Romans, becomes evident in the presumptive assertion Paul attributes to the wild olive: "Therefore, you will say: 'Branches were broken [ἐξεκλάσθησαν] in order that I might be grafted in.'" The *wild olive offers this telling rejoinder* to Paul's challenge to its potential arrogance: *it supposes that God has made way for it by breaking the other branches.*⁶⁰ The wild olive infers that *God favors it more than the broken natural branches*, for otherwise, why would they have been broken. This argument is based on zero sum thinking, and Paul appears to be getting at a comparison in which it supposes its own gain is of greater concern to God than the loss of the others to which God had been committed previously.

It is interesting that the wild olive is given a voice here, admitting presumptuousness, but legitimating it. Isa 10:5-15 and 37:24-25 similarly give voice to the presumptuousness of the king of Assyria, which will be turned against him, and in both cases a tree metaphor is employed to communicate the reversal of fortunes (cf. 37:30-32).

In spite of the rhetorical emphasis, or whether Paul reflected on the logical implications for his description of the some of Israel stumbling as now fallen/severed instead of merely injured, this became a central description of "Israel" and "Judaism" in Christian theology. Paul is interpreted to be describing Israel and not just some of Israel, a distinction that even when noted is taken to signify almost all Israelites are cut off or fallen and supplanted with non-Israelites, or carnal Israel is replaced with spiritual Israel, i.e., the church, which happens to be made up almost entirely of non-Israelites. It is thus important to continue to call attention to the fact that it is *some* Israelites, *not* Israel, at issue, and that it is the

⁵⁸ Photosynthesis was not discovered until the 1700's.

⁵⁹ See also 5.1.3-4. *Hist. plant.* 2.1.4, states that olives grows in more ways than any other plant, from a piece of the trunk (στελέχους) or cutting from the stock (πρέμνου), from the root (ρίζης), from a twig/young shoot (ράβδου), and from a stake (χάρακος). This appears to be a stick cut off, and sticks cut from olive wood are said to be able to sprout (*Caus. plant.* 5.1.4). Vegetative propagation of olives is primarily from planting of knobs (*uovuli*) at the base of the trunk that root easily when cut off, but also from truncheons, cuttings, and grafting, but seed planting tends to resemble wild forms in their morphology, and thus are useless for fruit (Zohary and Hopf, *Domestication of Plants in the Old World*, 146).

⁶⁰ Note that they are said by the wild branch to be broken (ἐκκλάω), not cut off or pruned (ἐκκόπτω).

portrayal of the non-Israelites' presumptuousness around with the allegory turns, and not an effort to describe Israel as a tree, or the viewpoint of the Israelites who are being discussed.

11:20-21: Following a rhetorical gesture of *agreement* (καλῶς), the wild olive is confronted in quite oppositional terms for its assertion. Note however that this rhetorical approach, by way of καλῶς ("well," "certainly"), unless known to be ironic, does not confront the zero sum assumption at work, or the assertion that the damage or removal of some branches was directly related to the insertion of itself. It is, as observed above, common to prune (but not "break") in order to make space for new growth or grafts. Paul's approach misses an opportunity to confront the notion of supplanting present in the wild olive's assertion, and appears to be more concerned with another dimension: what it mistakenly reflects about the nature of God, and specifically, God's commitment to his own, to empirical Israelites who are beloved for the sake of the fathers, regardless of their present disciplinary state. What is specifically objectionable is *presumptuousness* at the expense of these Israelites. Although apart from the oral presentation experienced by the first audience, it is not possible for later interpreters to be certain, I suggest that the message that follows the expression of approval serves as the marker that it was intended to cut ironically: Paul feigned to be impressed with the logic of the wild olive's rejoinder, but proceeded to confront its statement to be inappropriate, dangerous actually.⁶¹

Paul's reproof appears to seek to separate the two actions of breaking and grafting, and to explain that they are not merely expressions of God's favor and disfavor as if arbitrary, as if God wanted to make room for the wild olive at the expense of the other, cultivated branches. Rather, it is the failed *effort* of the branches, their *lack of faith*, or more probably *faithfulness* that led to their *present plight* of being broken. It is *not simply the result of God's whim, as if God arbitrarily* loved the new one more than the ones he has loved for a long time. God's favor as well as disfavor are expressions of God's justice. But he does love these branches nevertheless.

Israelites are in a covenant relationship with God, one made with their fathers, and God does not take kindly to the expression of arrogance or indifference, or even the harboring of harmful thoughts toward these offspring. God is presented to be like a parent who has only with great pain disciplined a child (the "it hurts me more than you" sentiment), and will not brook anyone making light of this development. His language perhaps expresses a veiled threat: don't make me choose, or you will not like the outcome. And note that Paul does not make clear here what faith or faithfulness was so lacking in the natural branches to deserve this severe reaction. If a non-Christ-believing Israelite were to read this, would he or she not wonder: is it lack of faith in the gospel for themselves, or the proposition of the gospel for the nations, or something else? In v. 21, the broken branches are described as *not having been spared*. Does this imply that they could be spared in spite of their unfaithfulness, except that it is not God's nature to allow that to happen? or that it is a step in a larger plan?

God confronts presumptuousness by calling attention to the wild olive's precarious predicament: "... Do not think highly, but fear, for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you." The wild olive is to *fear* the same fate instead of delighting in the other branches suffering of it. Why *should* the wild olive *be fearful*? Because of God's justice. Because *if God does not spare natural branches that express unfaith or unfaithfulness, neither will he spare the wild olive branch* (11:21; later, *all the more* will God not spare wild branches grafted in, but will graft back

⁶¹ Cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.6.54; Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 34-39.

in natural branches). At issue is not pride of the creature toward the Creator per se, but pride in one's own good fortune *at the expense of someone else*. Instead, sympathy for the other, and in this case, understanding how its own good fortune is tied to the present suffering of the others, as well as how its role of continuing in that good fortune humbly and with correct behavior (yet to be explained, but chs. 12–15 will do so), is also involved in helping the other return to good fortune.

The fate one understands these Israelites not to be spared is significant. Throughout the discourse, and at points along the way in this allegory too, it seems to be harsh discipline, breaking/stumbling, yet not breaking off/falling. But here, when Paul turns to disclosing the severity of the threat to the wild olive, the inference is to being broken off. At this point, it does seem that the argument of the grafted wild olive, and Paul's reply, presume the branches are broken off rather than just damaged, even though the more severe and explicit description has not yet been employed. And it is natural for the reader aware of the language at this point in the allegory to fill it in earlier. Moreover, it is natural to understand the analogy to be to being banished (cut off) rather than disciplined (dislocated); but was that the message Paul intended to communicate?

The wild olive is told that it "stands," or is "established" or "placed" (when translated "stands," ἔστηκεν suggests a mixed metaphor looking back to the running allegory)⁶² "by its πίστει, *faith*," or probably better, "*faithfulness*." At issue for the wild olive (Christ-believing non-Israelites) is not believing or trusting in Christ in the limited sense of confessing belief in Christ, for the wild olive believes, and is confident of its faith in Christ, and of God's grace, which form, after all, the foundations of its presumption (cf. 1:8, 12). At issue is whether its reaction to Israelites presently suffering discipline reflects *faithfulness* to the implications of its own new place in God's family. The opposite of presumption here is not belief in Christ, but the right attitude (and action) toward the non-Christ-believing Israelite neighbor. Hence, faithfulness to the covenant relationship with God in Christ seems to be the point. The mere confession of convictions can be self-serving, especially when set out in contrast to another. In this case, Paul confronts for harboring presumptuous toward as well as indifference to the suffering experience of the other who does not share that confession. They are also in covenant partnership with God, albeit presently suffering discipline, just as v. 28 affirms: presently "enemies [ἐχθροί]⁶³ for your sake, but beloved [ἀγαπητοί] for the sake of the fathers."

Paul's rhetorical strategy reveals no concern to confront either mistaken notions of works-righteousness, or an over-emphasis on grace; moreover, it does not betray a concern to challenge any problem of ethnic superiority on the part of the broken branches. If anything, it promotes covenantal nomism. The people of God, regardless of their faithfulness to date, must remain faithful rather than presuming favor, or they will experience disfavor instead.⁶⁴ That is

⁶² Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 841, for passive and intransitive tenses of active voice.

⁶³ Note the adjectival usage here, in balance with ἀγαπητοί. A better translation might be "alienated," which captures the sense of the arguments for stumbling and broken for the benefit of the nations (and see 5:10). Norman Beck, "Translations of the New Testament for Our Time," in *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligation*, ed. Mary C. Boys (Lanham, et al: A Sheed and Ward Book: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 200-10 (204-6).

⁶⁴ The problem for the unfaithful Israelites is neither the traditional concern with works-righteousness nor the New Perspective focus on ethnic sense of priority, but the failure to see that now non-Jews should be brought into the righteous ones apart from becoming members of Israel, apart from becoming Jews, apart from undertaking the rite of proselyte conversion. When that proposition—which is central to the proposition that in Christ this

how covenant partnerships work. I submit that Paul is enculturating non-Israelites into mainstream Israelite concepts of identity that Paul shares with his Israelite brethren, whether Christ-believing yet or not.⁶⁵ Contrary to the idea that Paul has abandoned Israelite priority or norms, Paul is assimilating non-Israelites into an Israelite cultural perspective.

It may be that Paul's choice of ὑψηλά to describe their pride or presumption in v. 20 (and in 11:25; cf. 12:3), explores the nuance that the attitude of the non-Israelite Christ-believers has to do with thinking about themselves from an *elevated* view, as if an olive looking down upon lower branches, perhaps even branches now on the ground below.⁶⁶ In Isa 2:11, ὑψηλοί and ὕψος are used in a similar way, and then in v. 12, the imagery of the lofty tree's pride is invoked. This word group has to do with height, and is used negatively for high-mindedness in the sense of pride or presumption of a higher standing (cf. Isa 2:17). In the introduction of Isaiah the metaphor of the tree is invoked to confront pride, and Paul explicitly cites from this introduction (9:29 cites Isa 1:9). Note also the rock serves as a place of refuge (2:10), and this seems to refer to the caves made in the rocks (caves and cliffs of rocks: Isa 2:19, 21), which are mentioned alongside of the tree language of 2:12. In Isa 3:8, Jerusalem stumbles and Judah falls. Did this influence Paul choice of these two metaphors, and their mixing?

11:22-24: Paul continues by explaining the faithfulness of God to be just as well as kind. He emphasizes the centrality of remaining faithful in order to enjoy God's favor instead of discipline, indeed discipline even to the point of wrath. His scolding of the wild olive suggests that it is not just its intellectual presumptuousness at issue, but also its lack of concerned behavior toward the suffering other that follows from such thinking. He does this in part by stating that God is quite naturally concerned even more for the suffering branches that are the target of its boast than for the wild olive. That is, if God does have favorites, it is not the wild olive, but the natural branches, even the ones presently broken: they remain members of the

awaited day has dawned, so that the nations are to turn to Israel's God as the One God of all humankind—is resisted by some Jews, instead of joining Paul to proclaim this good news, he regards that to signify unfaithfulness.

⁶⁵ Note that by the usual logic (although apparently not recognized, since Israel or these Israelites are regularly criticized for lack of faith in God's grace), the Israelites in view presumably have faith in the covenant promises to themselves, to the pattern of God that was disclosed to Abraham, which included circumcision in order to be a part of that covenant; at issue would be sustaining proper covenant-defined identity as God disclosed it to be forever, not lack of faith. One might say these Israelites have great trust in God's grace. So what is the referent of the faith/faithfulness lacking? It seems logical to suppose that it is trust in the way God is working now toward the Gentiles, the topic throughout this letter and Galatians, where the truth of the gospel is defined as the equal inclusion of Gentiles by faith in/of Christ apart from becoming Jews, members of Israel. The translation faithfulness would perhaps be better. It keeps in view that Paul believes these Jews are not being faithful to the proposition that they are to recognize and then declare the good news to the nations upon the arrival of the awaited age. Paul's analysis of their condition in these negative terms depends upon them being required to trust with him in the proposition, and thus, that it is faithful rather than unfaithful to God to announce that as if news, versus an unproven rumor.

⁶⁶ Calvin regularly included a picture on the title page of his works that depicted an olive tree with branches on the ground with several in the act of falling, with a human figure reaching up among the branches, and a banner in the tree stating, "*noli altum sapere*," be not high-minded. This is the Vulgate translation of 11:20, μή ὑψηλά φρόνει (*ne animo efferaris*, in John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, ed. and transl. John Owen [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947], 425). I am grateful to Klaus Haacker from bringing this to my attention, and to Allen Mueller, Director of the Luhr Library, Eden Theological Seminary, for making a copy of the title page from Calvin's 1563 Catechism available to me.

Israel of God, beloved for the sake of the fathers, those for whom the gifts and the calling are still in the present tense (9:2-5; 11:28-29).

The wild olive is told in v. 22, "therefore, behold God's patient mildness (χρηστότητα) and yet abrupt severity (ἀποτομίαν). The line of argument seems to focus on the character of God not to act arbitrarily: God is patient, but when pushed too far, his punishment is severe. Ἀποτομιάς communicates a sense of abruptness or harshness, and is used as a substantive for "a split or hewn piece of wood," while the verbal form is used for cutting off of a piece or segment, so that there may be a play on the theme that leads Paul to choose just this word [e.g., God's cutting action].⁶⁷ The point of emphasis is not to push God too far, but to behave so as to receive his mildness and generosity. Paul's choice of χρηστότητα may also be suggestive, playing off of the name Christos, alluding to God's mercy to Israel and the nations in Christ, if received faithfully; cf. 9:22.⁶⁸

The wild olive is told that those who have "fallen" (πεσόντας) have received God's abrupt severity (his cutting action), but it has received God's generous mildness, *if it "remains" in that state, otherwise it "will be cut off" (ἐκκοπήσῃ) also.* Paul's argument likely appeals to the notion of Israel's entitlement to be disciplined quickly for impiety so that it will not be as severe as it would otherwise be (2 Macc 6:12-17; cf. Ps 94:12; Prov 3:11-12; Jer 30:11; Lam 3:31-33; Jdt 8:27; Wis 12:1-2, 26; Pss. Sol. 10.1; 13.7; 16.1-5). This also tells against the idea of these Israelites being broken off in Paul's mind; being wounded makes more sense of the nature of discipline for those who are in the covenant made with the fathers.

For the first time we learn that the broken branches correspond to the runners in the earlier allegory (11:11). Yet where they were specifically said *not* to have *fallen* but to have *stumbled*, here they are represented in this mixed metaphorical way as having *fallen*. Moreover, for the first time we have a reference that makes clear that they are not merely broken, but *cut off*. Although the threat is specifically that the wild olive should fear being cut off, the "*also*" logically implies it to be the state of the broken branches too.

In terms of portraying the state of some presently unfaithful Israelites, who are represented in the earlier stumbling allegory to have merely tripped, until this point in the allegory to be merely injured (broken), and in the arguments following the tree allegory to be suffering but only until restored, the olive tree allegory at this point communicates a very different message. Now the stumbling Israelites are represented to have indeed fallen, to have already been cut off; they are not simply in a process that can be naturally stopped before stumbling results in a fall, but out of the tree until they come back in, which requires a miraculous reversal of a previously unthinkable outcome that is treated now as both conceivable and suffered, at least metaphorically. Moreover, in the history of interpretation, it is the message derived from this part of the tree allegory that has superseded the stumbling allegory, and been the basis for presuming that a non-Israelite wild olive has supplanted cut off Israelite cultivated olive branches. The consequences for describing the fate of Israel, or even just some Israelites in terms that Paul has otherwise denied to his interlocutor until now even within this allegory, are reversed, and the logic of the argument he wishes to make for eventual restoration has to be asserted by subverting the natural implications of the oleicultural terms from which he has worked: "*for God is able to graft them in again.*" A metaphor designed to threaten presumptuous non-Israelites of a horrible fate they might suffer but can avoid, becomes the headliner for a fate suffered by some Israelites, or Israel, although that

⁶⁷ Liddell & Scott, *Lexicon*, 223; Weiss, *TDNT* 9.489-91, but not applied as proposed here; cf. Esther 8:12.

⁶⁸ Daniel Stramara brought this suggestion to my attention.

outcome is unreservedly denied in the earlier allegory, and in the argument for the restoration of "all Israel" in the verses that follow.

Paul's argument for the temporary state of these Israelites is not the only thing that goes awry here. The interpretive tradition, by emphasizing this to be a description of the state of some (or most) Israelites as fallen or broken off (and all the more so when referred to simply as "Israel," or when said to be replaced by the church), instead of challenging this inference based upon the running allegory, has also contributed to this Pauline metaphor remaining out of step with the thrust of Paul's argument. For at this point, Paul is not seeking to represent the fate of some of Israel, but to warn the wild olive of the fate it will meet, all the more, if it is unfaithful. An allegory intended to proscribe Gentile presumption has become the source for descriptions of Israelite exclusion and replacement. Should this be so? Will it also require a miracle to be reversed?

Paul could arguably have made this point by staying with the idea that some of Israel are *broken*, yet the wild olive will experience an all the more severe fate of being broken *off* if it is not faithful, because, as the next verse will state, it is not even a natural part of the tree. But Paul did not do this. Perhaps he was concerned to warn the wild olive in such terribly stark terms that he did not reflect on this implication of his argument, or imagine that it would be taken in the direction that it has been, for even the word he put in the mouth of the wild branch was ἐκκλάω, not ἐκκόπτω.

This is a place where interpreters must decide which allegory to choose to describe Israel, and especially the condition of those of Israel who are being unfaithful (and to what they are being unfaithful). It is also where they must decide what is at issue that these Israelites (not Israel!) can be out of, or in a distressed state within. If out, out of the covenant with the fathers? Out of Israel? Such conclusions are hard to square with Paul's language elsewhere, such as in 9: 2-5, and in verses following this allegory. Paul insists in v. 25 that some are temporarily "hardened," better "callused" (πώρωσις, a process of protecting the body or plant while a wound heals), but nevertheless that "all Israel will be restored [σωθήσεται]," that is healed, in v. 26 (see below). Moreover, the unfaithful of Israel are declared to be "beloved of God for the sake of the fathers," and for them "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable [ἀμεταμέλητα: lit., without repentance]" (vv. 28-29).⁶⁹ I maintain that from Paul's perspective, these Israelites are not out of anything; rather, they are in, they are Israelites, a special identity that is different than being a member of the body of Christ (which includes Israelites and non-Israelites), but they are not presently functioning as they should be. In time they will "all" be restored. The tree allegory has proven unable to communicate this nuanced perspective effectively—it is itself broken.⁷⁰

In v. 23, the wild olive is told that if the broken natural branches do not remain unfaithful, they will be grafted back in, for *God is able* to do such a thing.⁷¹ God's power is

⁶⁹ Cf. Joseph Sievers, "'God's Gifts and Call Are Irrevocable': The Reception of Romans 11:29 through the Centuries and Christian-Jewish Relations," in *Reading Israel in Romans: Legitimacy and Plausibility of Divergent Interpretations*, eds. Cristina Grenholm and Daniel Patte (Romans through History and Culture Series; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 127-73.

⁷⁰ Similarly assessing a problem in this direction, see Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, 145-47.

⁷¹ A similar special consideration of regrafting in is not mentioned on behalf of the wild olive branch, were it to become unfaithful and be cut off. It is interesting to note, that, for all of Wright's criticism of Israelites supposedly appealing to a "favored nation clause" (Wright, "Romans," 694, passim), and being cut off, that he offers consolation to the Christian Gentile, so that even if Christians fail to be faithful, this will not result in being cut off, but only temporarily disciplined (686), which runs against the grain of Paul's argument here, threatening the

magnified, but also highlighted is the role of faithfulness for those with whom God interacts. God's generous mildness is not to be underestimated any more than his abrupt severity overestimated, especially in the case of Israelites.⁷² Once again, Paul's language does not betray a concern with works-righteousness, or overconfidence in God's calling, or suggest that these Israelites were guilty of ethnic superiority; they are simply accused of being unfaithful to their covenant calling. The continued ethnic identity and priority of the broken branches as Israelites, as distinguished from the Christ-believing encoded audience, who are members of the other nations, is fundamental to the case Paul seeks to make, and to the way Paul makes it.

In v. 24, the wild olive is told that if it, "being *cut off* (ἐξέκοπη) from an olive tree that is *wild by nature*," can be—"contrary to nature grafted into a cultivated olive tree, *how much more* (a *fortiori*; *qal vahomer*) will the *natural branches* be grafted into their *own* olive tree." Note that the wild olive is referred to also as "cut off" of its own "wild" tree, and the point is to put it in its inferior place *according to nature*. This point seems to be a very important element in the development of the metaphorical tension in the allegory, and throughout this section of the letter. That Paul calls the procedure he has described "contrary to nature" may suggest that he knows he is reversing normal grafting practices in this allegory, by depicting a wild scion grafted onto a cultivated tree. The contrast between "wild" and "cultivated" is made explicit, so too that between "grafting contrary to nature" and "grafting" to restore what is "natural." The cognitive difference between wild and cultivated is mixed with that between unnatural and natural, thereby magnifying the semantic tension. And the conceptual difference between these two kinds of olives, and thus between Israelites and members of the other nations, is framed in *a fortiori* terms. Gentile presumption is thereby reprovved "severely"; Paul wants to "cut off" any ideas that might be developing in that direction.

The wild olive remains identifiably different than, and by nature inferior to the natural olives, and this difference is integral to the imagery and the message.⁷³ It takes its precarious place alongside the natural branches, not in place of them; it is a part of the tree, but it can never be natural to the cultivated tree in the same way as the olives that grow from its own natural branches. In the *ekklesia*, a Christ-believing non-Israelite is not "grafted into Israel." He or she does not become an Israelite, a member of Israel; he or she becomes a co-participant representing the other nations "grafted," better "adopted" into the family of God.⁷⁴ Attention to the special, privileged, yet humble place of Christ-believing non-Israelites is at the center of the Pauline message here.

Although twigs for grafting can be cut and saved in a dormant state for weeks or months,⁷⁵ it does not make a lot of sense to cut off branches from a tree that one intends to graft into that same tree in the future.⁷⁶ The image of cutting off communicates a final judgment that runs counter to the introductory guarantee of the holiness of the branches

wild branch with being cut off, while appealing to the restoration of the natural branches after a temporary time of discipline.

⁷² Perhaps Paul drew his inspiration for this move from Isa 59, where, in metaphorical terms, including images of plants and trees, God is portrayed as miraculously restoring Israel after no one else comes to her rescue.

⁷³ Cf. Johnson Hodge, "Olive Trees," 84.

⁷⁴ Cf. Johnson Hodge, "Olive Trees and Ethnicities."

⁷⁵ Lundquist, "Of Grafting," 84.

⁷⁶ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 11.8, mentions grafting back in cut off branches to draw an analogy to those who cut themselves off from other men, to make the point that if rejoined, just like a limb cut off, they will not be quite the same as before, although he calls for them to rejoin nonetheless. This functions as a warning, he does not want them to separate themselves in the first place, in order to avoid ever suffering this disadvantage.

because of the holy root, as well as the claim of eventual restoration. Should Paul's idea of Israel be derived from such language? Or instead, should the issue communicated be about how non-Israelites fit into God's plan in an unexpected way, to sever at the source any incipient presumptuous ideas among the non-Israelite Christ-believers in Rome toward those Israelites not accepting them to be also members of the people of God now according to the proposition of the gospel? That kind of resentment developing toward those who do not accept one on one's own terms may be natural, but Paul does not want it to arise or be sustained.

Paul appeals to the miracle of the regrafting in of the natural branches in order to show that it requires less of a miracle than does the grafting in of a wild olive, bears witness to the inadequacy of the allegory to describe the temporary state of these Israelites, or of Israel. But that was not its purpose! It was developed to confront Gentile presumptuousness with a message about their precarious state, and to portray the temporary state of and vicarious suffering of these Israelites on their behalf. These concepts are essential to the warning he sounds for these non-Israelites, so that they will properly understand themselves precisely in positive rather than negative relation to the fate of all Israelites.⁷⁷ But in order to make the *a fortiori* comparison by which he aims to communicate the severity of the threat to their well-being, he portrays some Israelites as if in a state that is naturally final, cut off. The unintended consequence of this approach is the subversion of his overall message. Rather than successfully confronting arrogance among Christ-believing Gentiles toward those Jews of Rome who do not share their faith in Christ, and Jews everywhere since, it has been understood to support the notion that they have been cut out and replaced.

Paul's approach is not indifferent to ethnicity or ethnic priority, but appeals to them as the basis for confronting this wild olive cutting. If one is to extrapolate anything about Paul's view of the continued role of ethnic identity among Christ-believers from this, should it not be that Paul recognizes ethnic diversity in the ekklesia? His argument does not function as if Christ-faith has eliminated either ethnicity or difference. He attributes to God ethnic discrimination, witnessed in the theme of "the Jew first, but also the Greek," that runs through the letter. The point is not to eliminate or deny ethnic identity, but to keep its relative valuation in proper perspective.⁷⁸ That perspective involves remaining faithful to that which God has shown to each group, remaining within his patient generosity rather than provoking his abrupt severity. It seems a natural inference that one should also be concerned that God's favor be won for the other too, but what they can do besides upholding the right, humble attitude is not articulated until 12:1 It is the theme throughout the so-called paraenesis of the letter that follows in chapters 12–15, where Christ-believers learn not only how to behave rightly toward each other, but toward their non-Christ-believing "stumbling/weak" Jewish brothers and sisters too.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ As R. Kendall Soulen, puts the matter: "Ultimately, Rom 9-11 is theologically significant because it propels Gentile Christians to recognize that affirmation of – and connection to -- God's irrevocable calling of the Jewish people is an internal, essential, and perpetual dimension of their own identity as Christians" ("They are Israelites': The Priority of the Present Tense for Jewish-Christian Relations," [conf volume pp. ???])

⁷⁸ This is also how I understand Gal 3:28, where it is clear that slaves and masters as well as men and women continue to exist and be different, but they are equal in status, as well as the implications of 1 Cor. 7:17-24. For Paul, difference remains, but it must not legitimate discrimination in the present age among the Christ-believers.

⁷⁹ Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 85-165.

THE MYSTERY OF THE "HARDENING," "FULLNESS," AND "RESTORATION" OF "ALL ISRAEL"

There is not space to discuss the interpretation of vv. 25-27 or the rest of the chapter in new ways in light of the examination of vv. 11-24.⁸⁰ Paul appears to draw from the tree allegory he has just completed in the metaphorical word choices employed in Romans 11:25-26a, although he is no longer developing the allegory. The theme stays the same: Paul sets out an argument in order to censure presumptuousness among the Christ-believing non-Israelites in Rome, lest they become "high-minded in themselves" (ἑαυτοῖς φρόνιμοι). Like the allegory itself, as well as its uneven fit with the previous allegories of the stumbling and of the dough, this language can be as misleading as it can be enlightening. But it should be noted at least that three of the key terms and the context of their usage can be understood to represent plant or tree metaphors, and are found in Theophrastus' descriptions of plant life: (πώρωσις [the process of hardening a plant to protect it while healing from a wound], πλήρωμα [fullness or filling out of a plant], σωθήσεται [restoring or saving a plant]). In addition, as already discussed, the imagery of plants and trees fills the context of the proof texts from Isaiah 59 and 27 that Paul cites.

CONCLUSION

The allegory of the olive tree does not sit well with the surrounding allegories and arguments. The problem includes elements internal to the allegory, and how elements of its message contradict the thrust of the allegory of the stumbling that preceded it, as well as the metaphor-laden argument for the restoration of "all Israel" that follows it. I submit that the tree allegory is the one Paul least designed to portray his conception of the unfaithful of Israel, or his notion of Israel overall. Rather, it communicates his concern to confront the arrogance of the Christ-believing members of the nations in Rome toward non-Christ-believing Israelites, portraying the precariousness of their state by way of the figure of a wild olive cutting precariously grafted to a cultivated tree. In order to make his *a fortiori* case against these Christ-believing Gentiles, he must portray the state of these Israelites in a severe light. If they can be disciplined severely, all the more can be the alien olive. Thus these Gentiles are to recognize just how severe will be the consequences for failing to nip their presumptuousness in the bud.

The implications from Paul's portrayal of the olive tree to make that case leads to a theological development that I believe Paul did not anticipate when he created it. For it is used to describe Israel as if a tree, and the state of non-Christ-believing Israelites (often: "Israel") as broken off, discarded, and dead branches on the ground below the tree, which clearly depicts them as having fallen. In terms of the stumbling metaphor, that is a condition Paul emphatically insisted did not apply. And this conceptualization of Israel has been extended beyond the context of Romans to Jews and Judaism ever since. That extension depends upon Paul's allegory remaining descriptive beyond its rhetorical and historical limitations, or its original prescriptive purpose to confront mistaken notions of self-importance among the early non-Israelite Christ-believers, and their disregard for their non-Christ-believing Israelite neighbors, who are their brothers and sisters in the family of God. Ironically, an allegory

⁸⁰ In a future project, I hope to take up the topic of the various metaphors and messages in 11:25-36, and bring them into conversation with the argument made in *Mystery of Romans*.

written to support them has resulted in the theological legitimation of ideas and policies running in quite the opposite direction.

I believe Paul would deny that these Israelites were broken off as it has been presented in the interpretive tradition, and that he would extend this denial to today if asked to describe the state of Jews and Judaism.⁸¹ He would instead insist in the same unmistakable terms that he communicated in the stumbling allegory, and throughout the letter when such negative inferences might be drawn by his imaginary dialogue partner: "May it never be!" Rather, the tree allegory was created with the special concern to describe the present state of the Gentile believers in Christ, and the inferences about these Israelites are (il)logical byproducts of that explanation. What we have here is a Pauline metaphor gone awry.

If we approach the tree allegory as if designed not so much to represent the current state of these Israelites, or Israel per se, but the present tenuous state of the Gentiles in Christ, it will keep the focus on Paul's stated concern throughout this allegory and section. That concern is to change the minds of these Gentiles toward the Israelites who do not share their faith in Christ "yet," from presumption to empathy. For Paul, theirs is not a final state of unbelief, but a "not yet" state that he expects to continue until he can get to Rome to complete his ministry among the synagogues there, followed by turning fully to the members of the nations. The Christ-believing Gentiles to whom he writes represent an anomaly. However glad he is for their faith, he remains concerned that their nascent resentment toward the Jews of Rome who do not accept their claims to equal standing apart from proselyte conversion based upon the proposition of the message of Christ, will prevent the successful completion of his ministry among them. That is why he writes this letter.⁸²

At the root of many communication failures are different perceptions of reality, along with different valuations of the options for comprehending it. Coupled with the generative dynamics of metaphor to constrain and mislead the imagination as well as to enlighten and correct,⁸³ and all the more so for allegories, we must be careful not allow the possibilities for Paul's view of Israel, or of the place of non-Israelites in the family of God, to be limited by analogies to, for example, the realm of trees, or stumbling, or dough. This caution extends to rhetorical efforts to describe "reality" by way of illustration in general, and to our lack of knowledge of the dynamics of the metaphorical or allegorical elements themselves. How much do we know about olive tree propagation in Paul's time and place, and how much did Paul, or his secretary, or his audience, or the earliest church interpreters, or the reformers, or commentators to date, know? In addition, the gaps in the details of the allegory itself serve as a caution about pressing the metaphor too far, about expecting the dynamics of trees and

⁸¹ Cf. Mark D. Nanos, "Challenging the Limits That Continue to Define Paul's Perspective on Jews and Judaism," in *Reading Israel in Romans: Legitimacy and Plausibility of Divergent Interpretations* (ed. Cristina Grenholm and Daniel Patte; Romans through History and Culture Series; Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 217-29.

⁸² Cf. Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 3-40, passim.

⁸³ Donald A. Schön, "Generative Metaphor: A Perspective on Problem-Setting in Social Policy," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 254-83; see also Max Black, "More About Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 19-43 (36-41); Michael J. Reddy, "The Conduit Metaphor--A Case of Frame Conflict in Our Language about Language," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 284-324.

grafting to accurately or comprehensively describe the dynamics of people and kinship, to serve as perfect analogies from which to draw answers to our theological queries.⁸⁴

It is likely the case that this is not the concept that later interpreters have turned to Romans attuned to find, and it is inconsistent with their framework of consciousness or perception of reality, all the more so now after thousands of years without a reversal of opinion on the part of most Israelites. Moreover, to the degree that exegetes are unaware of just how unusual and unproductive it would be to graft wild olive cuttings onto cultivated trees, which is central to detecting the analogy the allegory is constructed around, the central message of the allegory goes unobserved, or is subordinated to other features that are more attractive, more conducive to enhancing self-esteem and group priority, which "naturally" involves devaluation of the other.⁸⁵

The emphasis for interpreters of Romans has often been on Israelites being cut off and Gentiles being grafted on in their place, with the church now the true or spiritual Israel, however phrased. Little attention has been given to the continuing aspect of ethnic identity and the hierarchical values around which Paul worked. In the prevailing interpretations, neither the temporariness of this stage, nor the precariousness of this development has been sufficiently sustained. This investigation leads me to conclude that the primary controls to apply to every interpretive decision for this passage are along the following lines: *does it contribute to Paul's goal of making the members from the nations recognize their own humble place? Does it help turn presumptuous judgmentalism into empathetic generosity? Does it foster regard for the "other" as part of "self." Does it focus on being only "a"—not "the"—member of God's larger family?*

Paul sought to confront any temptation to be dismissive of or arrogant toward these Israelites, to suppose that God now loved the members from the nations other than Israel best. He sought to communicate how their new membership and its responsibilities were intimately involved with the way that God was going to restore these Israelites in due time. That would be, in part, by way of his activity among themselves, and thus, by the way of how they lived their lives among these Israelites, to which Paul turns in chapters 12--15. I believe this was also the way that Paul understood his service to these Gentiles, and therefore, lived out his dedication to the restoration of his Israelite brothers and sisters. Attending to Paul's arguments from this perspective just might make his tree allegory more able to properly stand.

⁸⁴ Black, "Metaphor," 293, observes that the literal paraphrase of a metaphor can say too much and emphasize the wrong things, and that it can be an inadequate translation because "it fails to give the *insight* that the metaphor did."

⁸⁵ That is, according to social identity theory: Hogg and Abrahams, *Social Identifications*; Henri Tajfel, ed., *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (London and New York: Academic Press, 1978).