

Images of Jews and Judaism in Paul's Letter to the Romans: Challenging Translation Decisions That Subvert Paul's Message

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In Romans 11, Paul explicitly addressed Christ-following non-Jews about the standing of Jews who did not share their convictions about Jesus. Those interested in challenging the legacy of harmful teaching about and policies toward Jews and Judaism, such as those engaged in Christian-Jewish relations, widely recognize that this text offers hope for a different way forward.

This chapter informed the Vatican II's seminal reconsideration of the Jewish people and Judaism in the 1960's. It declared that, "the Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made" (*Nostra Aetate* 4). Although this represented a radical position for the Catholic Church to uphold at the time, it is perhaps telling to note that this represents merely a restatement of the position the apostle articulated some 1900 years earlier in Romans 11:28b-29 (*NRSV*): "but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." Thus while the theological viewpoint expressed in this foundational text was obviously not something new, the decision to make it central for developing Catholic doctrine and policy represented a new development.

Pope John Paul II contributed in many ways to this spring-like renewal after centuries of chilling dismissals of the continued covenant standing of Jews and Judaism, which, ironically, had also appealed to statements made by Paul, including in Romans 11, even to these same verses. The Pope stayed very close to Scripture in his celebrations of this shared heritage. He stressed the contemporary implications derived from reading 9:4-5 and 11:28-29 in the present tense when Paul wrote these texts by declaring, "the people of God of the old covenant never revoked by God" includes "the present-day people of the covenant concluded with Moses," they are "partners in a covenant of eternal love which was never revoked."¹ When he visited the synagogue in Rome in 1986, the Pope pronounced the Jews his "dearly beloved brothers," even "elder brothers" in a special relationship based on "a living heritage."² In his "Homily at Mount Sinai," it is clear that John Paul II understood the covenant in view to include the Torah; drawing on Ex. 31:18, he declared: "But now on the heights of Sinai this same God seals his love by making the covenant that he will never renounce."³ Cardinal Walter Kasper, head of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, continued this trajectory: "... as Christians we know that God's covenant with Israel by God's faithfulness is not broken (Rom 11:29; 3:4)...."⁴

¹ The issue of the covenant and statements such as these by Pope John Paul II, and others, are surveyed by Hans Hermann Henrix, "The covenant has never been revoked: Basis of the Christian-Jewish relationship." Accessed on Feb. 13, 2012: http://www.jcrelations.net/The_covenant_has_never_been_revoked.2250.0.html#27.

² "Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome," April 13, 1986. Accessed Feb. 13, 2012: http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/john_paulii/romesynagogue.htm.

³ February 26, 2000. Accessed Feb. 13, 2012: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/romancatholic/pope-john-paul-ii/332-jp2-00feb26.html>.

⁴ Walter Kasper, "The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: A Crucial Endeavour of the Catholic Church," section III. Accessed Feb. 13, 2012: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/kasper/642-kasper02nov6>.

Many Protestant and other Ecumenical organizations have made similar pronouncements also drawn largely from Romans 11. For example, the World Council of Churches declared in 1988 that the covenant with the Jewish people remains valid, and Judaism is a living tradition.⁵ The United Church of Christ affirmed "its recognition that God's covenant with the Jewish people has not been rescinded or abrogated by God, but remains in full force, inasmuch as 'the gifts and the promise of God are irrevocable' (Rom 11:29)."⁶ In 1996, the United Methodist Church stated: "We believe that just as God is steadfastly faithful to the biblical covenant in Jesus Christ, likewise God is steadfastly faithful to the biblical covenant with the Jewish people.... Both Jews and Christians are bound to God in covenant, with no covenantal relationship invalidated by any other."⁷ The Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations spelled out the issues and implications thus:

For centuries Christians claimed that their covenant with God replaced or superseded the Jewish covenant. We renounce this claim. We believe that God does not revoke divine promises. We affirm that God is in covenant with both Jews and Christians. Tragically, the entrenched theology of supersessionism continues to influence Christian faith, worship, and practice, even though it has been repudiated by many Christian denominations and many Christians no longer accept it. Our recognition of the abiding validity of Judaism has implications for all aspects of Christian life.⁸

In spite of these appeals to Romans 11, and others like them, the language choices that continue to be made by the committees that translate this text, and by many in their interpretations of it, do not suggest a shared concern to reevaluate Paul's message here. Instead, they continue to express language choices that undermine this promising development at the source.⁹ In the case of *New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*, which has become a standard choice for many academic audiences, it is disheartening to discover some decisions in chapter 11, vv. 17 and 28 in particular (which we will review), are more negative and introduce a greater degree of replacement theology than previous translations, including the *King James Version (KJV)*. As a result, among English only readers anyway, the best of intentions are undermined at the very source to which they should be able to turn to understand and explain these reconsidered position statements on Jews and Judaism.

In addition to the direct language about Jews and Judaism this text provides for positive Christian assessments of Jews who do not share their faith in Jesus Christ, Romans 11 contains a great deal of metaphorical language that has had an equally profound influence upon Christian perceptions of Jews, both positive and negative. Moreover, the interpretation of the message

⁵ Franklin Sherman, "The Road to Reconciliation: Protestant Church Statements on Christian-Jewish Relations," 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), 242.

⁶ Sherman, "The Road to Reconciliation," 245-46.

⁷ Sherman, "The Road to Reconciliation," 245.

⁸ "A Sacred Obligation: Rethinking Christian Faith in Relation to Judaism and the Jewish People: A Statement by the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations," in *Seeing Judaism Anew* (ed. M. Boys), xiv.

⁹ In addition, other texts (especially from Hebrews) have been understood to mitigate the otherwise seemingly clear message of these texts in Romans 11. Moreover, this trajectory has been challenged and altered by some Catholic interpreters in order to deny its otherwise seemingly clear reference to the endurance of the Mosaic Covenant, although that continues to be adamantly maintained by others. See Philip A. Cunningham, "Official Ecclesial Documents to Implement Vatican II on Relations with Jews: Study Them, Become Immersed in Them, and Put Them into Practice," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 4 (2009): 1-36; online: <http://escholarship.bc.edu/scjr/vol4>.

derived in this chapter influences decisions that are made throughout the letter, especially in the chapters that follow it. Once Paul has completed his argument, the "Therefore," of 12:1 announces how Christ-believing non-Jews are called to live in respectful relationships with each other and with all humankind, not least the Jews who were the topic in the chapters leading up to and through chapter 11, although, like the translation of chapter 11, that is not always readily apparent in the prevailing translations of chapter 12--16.¹⁰

While there are more topics and details than we can discuss here, we will survey several major ideas, word choices, and turns of phrase in Romans 11 that warrant reconsideration.¹¹ These include the two metaphors Paul develops: that of the stumbling while running to announce a message in vv. 11-15, and that of the olive tree in vv. 16-24, in which the language of "broken off" and "cut off" as well as "hardened" and "part of" or "partially" arise. Following these metaphors, we will consider a language choice arising in a direct statement that the Israelites in view are "enemies" in v. 28 (moreover, "of God," according to the *NRSV*).

Hopefully the following demonstration of alternatives to explore will offer future translators reason to alter their choices, even challenge, on the basis of historical probability, those who may not share these sensibilities.

Some Are "Stumbling," but They Have "Not Fallen"

In v. 11, Paul presents his viewpoint by way of a metaphor about some Israelites stumbling on a pathway. He portrays Israelites on the way toward a goal, drawing on an image of heralds bringing news to Israel and from Israel to the nations developed in Isaiah (see below). Within this imagery he insists emphatically that the Israelites in Rome to whom he is referring have merely *missed a step* and *stumbled*--but certainly *not fallen*.

Although conveying a judgment about these Israelites who do not share Paul and his audience's convictions about the meaning of Jesus for themselves, Paul employs an active image that bespeaks a temporary stage with a yet to be realized positive outcome. The perspective expressed is condescending, to be sure, based on being correct and those in view being mistaken. But at the same time, Paul expresses a generous disposition, one that is based on the conviction that they are all involved in an ongoing process in which their fates are inseparably linked. He also declares emphatically that things are not in a complete or final state from which conclusive judgments can or should be made.

Paul develops the image further in vv. 12-15, and in other images and statements throughout the balance of the chapter. He explains that this momentary misstep represents a stage in which non-Israelites can join in on the path alongside of those Israelites who are stumbling and those who have maintained their footing (like he views himself). He also insists that the non-Israelites' own ultimate aspirations will only be realized after those presently

¹⁰ This topic is discussed in detail in my *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

¹¹ For more detailed discussions see Mark D. Nanos, "'Broken Branches': A Pauline Metaphor Gone Awry? (Romans 11:11-36)," in *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9--11* (ed. F. Wilk and J. R. Wagner; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 339-76 (online earlier paper presentation: <http://www.marknanos.com/BrokenBranches-8-1-08.pdf>); idem, "'Callused,' Not 'Hardened': Paul's Revelation of Temporary Protection Until All Israel Can Be Healed," in *Reading Paul in Context: Explorations in Identity Formation* (ed. K. Ehrensperger and J. B. Tucker; London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 52-73 (online earlier paper presentation: <http://www.marknanos.com/Callused-CentralSBL-5-6-10.pdf>); idem, "Romans," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (ed. A.-J. Levine and M. Z. Brettler; New York, et al: Oxford University Press, 2011), 253-86 (275-79 annotates Romans 11).

stumbling regain their stride. There are several dynamics central to the argument developed in this metaphorical language.

Paul insists that the non-Israelites who join the course do not replace those who are stumbling. He describes a road on which some Israelites are now stumbling while other Israelites continue on, with a gap opening between them into which others enter. The non-Israelites who thereby enter onto the pathway do not replace those who had been on it, but rather join along with those of Israel who are stumbling as well as those who are not. He emphatically asserts that the goal will be realized only when those temporarily stumbling have regained their stride and finished the course.

This resistance to the notion of replacement theology suggests that Paul anticipated that the image could be (mis)understood to express the zero-sum idea that there is only so much space available, that the elimination of those stumbling could logically be considered a desirable advantage for those who have just joined. Thus Paul resists anyone drawing that inference by declaring that those from the nations newly admitted to the path will only experience the ultimate goal when those of Israel temporarily stumbling regain their step, not by them stumbling "so as to fall." They are to see themselves as new, *additional* members of a subgroup within a larger group; moreover, they are co-dependent upon the success of all the members thereof if they are to enjoy the ultimate goal--resurrection itself.¹²

Throughout Romans 9--11 Paul draws on the images in Isaiah of stumbling as well as heralds announcing news to communicate that some of the messengers of Israel have stumbled along the way and so are not yet announcing the message that has been entrusted to them to bring to the nations, the message of the arrival of the awaited day with the resurrection of Christ.¹³ From the opening of the letter to its conclusion, Paul presents his own apostleship to the nations to be based on Scriptural expectations for that awaited event (cf. 1:1-15; 3:2; 10:14-16; 15). He draws upon this special role for Israel to herald God's word when he mentions that the inclusion (salvation) of these non-Israelites on the journey among the Israelites will serve to provoke the stumbling of some Israelites to jealousy (vv. 11-15). Paul explains that *his ministry* to the nations is calculated to provoke his fellow Israelites to *jealousy* (vv. 13-14). Likewise, in v. 11, the joining of these non-Israelites on the path while some Israelites are stumbling behind is described in terms of provoking jealousy.

In other words, Paul believes that when these Israelites see his success among the nations they will want to *emulate* him, to join him in completing this special task with which God has entrusted Israel, namely, to be the heralds of God's good news for the nations.¹⁴ Paul's point is not that his fellow Israelites will begrudge the entrance of those from the nations, but that they will not want to miss out on playing their part in bringing this to pass. Seeing Paul's successful

¹² Paul's use of this image to the end that he argues suggests that it is not a race with a prize for the winners (as individuals or as a group in competition with another group) that he envisions. Rather, it seems that he is describing the movement of a group of people who will only have successfully reached their destination when all of the slowest members have safely arrived too, invoking an in-group sense of concern about the welfare of everyone else on the journey.

¹³ Isa 8:14-15 with chs. 27--29; see Nanos, "Broken Branches," 341-50.

¹⁴ Cf. Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 247-55; idem, "The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 283-304 (300-3). Jealousy is not the same as envy in Greek. Jealousy, to which Paul refers, revolves around the idea that one wants something for themselves, often in the positive sense of wanting to emulate admirable behavior. Envy, on the other hand, is the begrudging of another, usually of their gaining or having something desirable, even if the one who begrudges the other also has that which is desirable.

ministry among the nations will cause them to reconsider whether the promised and awaited age has begun.

In short, Paul envisions these non-Israelites joining in alongside of the heralds on the way to announce the news to the nations. Some Israelites are marching ahead, while other heralds have fallen behind. They will witness the inclusion of those who have responded positively to the message announced by those ahead of them, such as Paul, and thus have to consider whether God is involved in this development.¹⁵ Paul deduces that seeing this development will provoke those Israelites to feel jealousy, to want to take up this task too. Thus these non-Israelites play a positive, albeit provocative role in the restoration of his fellow Israelites to the course that God has set for them.¹⁶

Note that by Paul's logic he does not regard the Israelites who do not (yet) share his convictions about Christ to be (already) out of the covenants made with Abraham or Israel through Moses: their covenant standing remains "irreversible" (cf. 9:4-5; 11:1-2, 28-29). These Israelites are not in the same situation as non-Israelites. Rather, these fellow Israelites are judged by him to be "stumbling" *temporarily*, that is, slow to come to share his point of view on where Israel is, and thus the nations are, on God's timeline for reconciling all of the cosmos. They need their footing restored (i.e., saved) so that they can complete the course, which he claims all Israel will experience (11:25-27).

It is a presupposition of Paul's argument that the Israelites he is discussing are already on the path regardless of the less than desirable situation some of them are temporarily experiencing. They too have covenant standing by the calling and the faithfulness of the fathers, as well as a special gift to proclaim God's good news to the nations. Some (most) are not (yet) persuaded that the appropriate time has (yet) arrived to join Paul and other Christ-followers in making this announcement (see vv. 28-32, discussed below), because many are not (yet) convinced of the propositional claims Paul and other Christ-followers are making about Jesus (and many are not even yet aware of such claims). Those from the other nations who are turning to God in Christ, such as the audience he addresses, have had to enter onto the path; that is, are being saved (rescued from worshipping other gods), brought into covenant standing from outside of it.¹⁷

¹⁵ A parallel to Paul's thinking is developed in Acts, which describes the reaction of Israelite Christ-followers to the unexpected receipt of the Holy Spirit by non-Israelites in ch. 10, and argues from the basis of this divine action to the conclusion reached in ch. 15; namely, that the developments among these non-Israelites bear witness to God's actions, which are interpreted, in conjunction with searching the Scriptures, as the arrival of the awaited age to come.

¹⁶ The point here is missed when interpreted to suggest that Paul is signaling that these Israelites will react negatively to the entrance of those from the nations. That interpretation is a natural corollary of the usual understanding that what is portrayed is salvation or entrance into the covenant for non-Israelites as if that required the removal and thus replacement of Israelites, or at least that it signaled their removal from the covenant or salvation. However, it is not logical to assume that Paul would imagine that these Israelites would suppose that they have been replaced in the covenant if they have not been persuaded of the gospel proposition. Rather, they might be challenged to reconsider the message Paul proclaims if they witness Paul's success turning those from the nations to the worship of God, as expected of Israelite heralds upon the arrival of the age to come (v. 13), and all the more if those from the nations have joined alongside of Paul and some other Israelites on the way to announcing this news to others from the nations, when they themselves are not yet enjoying this awaited moment of vocational fulfillment (v. 11).

¹⁷ Paul maintains a distinction here between the identity of Israelites who have not confessed Jesus as Christ and those from the other nations, and thus what it is that each is expected to do. Israelites are to be faithful to the truth claims of the message that Jesus is the awaited Messiah (Christ) precisely because they are already in a covenant relationship, which involves declaring this message to the nations. Non-Israelites are to be faithful to

Paul addresses the responsibility of these non-Israelite Christ-followers in terms of their *concepts* about and *attitude* toward those Israelites, which involves comprehending that their own standing among these Israelites is new, later, and co-dependent. In the next metaphor he will add to this the importance of *recognizing* their precarious place among these Israelites. In the chapters that follow Paul will address their *behavioral responsibility*, which is only at best implicit here: they are to avoid putting any obstruction in these Israelites' path that could cause them to fall, such as disrespecting Torah-derived Israelite norms for right behavior (see esp. ch. 14).¹⁸ Until the resurrection arrives for which all await, they are to leave judging of the other to God and to instead be concerned with their own faithfulness, observed with generosity toward all fellow travelers (just as they depend upon God's generosity toward themselves), and regardless of any ill-will that they might suffer along the way (cf. 2; 12--15).

Nevertheless, even within this overall positive message in vv. 11-15, of stumbling but not falling, and of complete success for the nations being dependent upon the eventual success of all of Israel, there are translation decisions that obscure the positive thrust, even reverse it.

"Through their Fall/Transgression"? "Failure/Defeat"?

In v. 11, the *KJV* translates the second sentence in a way that immediately *reverses* Paul's denial that those presently stumbling have fallen: "I say then, Have they stumbled that they should *fall*? God forbid: but rather through their *fall* salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy" (emphasis added). The English reader would suppose that Paul has simply repeated the Greek word translated "fall" (πέσωσιν, or "fall down," a subjunctive form of the verb πίπτω) in the first sentence, but that is not the case, and it would make little sense to have done so: Paul has just denied that they have fallen, so why represent them as having fallen to begin the next point? The *NASB* and *NIV* reinterpret and obscure the metaphorical color of the point by translating the phrase "But by their *transgression*..." (emphasis added). The *NRSV* retains the basic point: "But through their *stumbling*" (emphasis added). The Greek noun is παραπτώματι, which in this metaphorical context would be better translated "but by their *misstep*," which explains why they are "stumbling"; i.e., by their missing a step (and thus stumbling). An interesting alternative would be, "but by their *delay* [i.e., falling behind],"¹⁹ which would instead suggest that as the result of their stumbling they are lagging behind. Either way, it would suggest that those Israelites who have stumbled have left a gap between themselves and those Israelites who have not stumbled on the course (such as Paul sees himself), a gap on the path into which some non-Israelites have now stepped in between these two groups of Israelites.

The problem of failing to maintain the argumentative point as well as to develop it within the metaphorical illustration continues in the translations of v. 12. The *KJV* translates v. 12 thus: "Now if the *fall* of them be the riches of the world, and the *diminishing* of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (emphasis added). Paul repeats the noun παραπτώματι from the second sentence of v. 11 in the first clause of v. 12, which the *KJV* repeats in its translation as "fall." Likewise, the *NASB* and *NIV* repeat the choice of "transgression," and the

this message by turning from other gods, and thus other ways of life, to the One God of Israel and all of the nations, thereby only now entering into a similar covenant relationship with God and to the way of life that involves. Paul communicates this very message in a different way in vv. 30-32, although the point is obscured when the cognates of ἀπειθέω around which Paul works that argument are translated as "disobedience," as they usually are, instead of the logical alternative, "disbelief" or "non-persuadedness."

¹⁸ See Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 123-24.

¹⁹ Cf. LSJ, *Lexicon*, 1322.

NRSV "stumbling." I suggest repeating "misstep" or "delay." In the next clause of v. 12, whereas the *KJV* translates ἥττημα as "*diminishing*," the *NASB* chooses "*failure*," the *NIV* "*loss*," and the *NRSV* "*defeat*." The latter choices maintain neither the point nor the metaphorical imagery; rather, they suggest that those who have stumbled have *failed*, suffered *defeat*; in short, that they indeed have *fallen*. Although "diminishing" (*KJV*) does not fit the metaphorical image, it is more in keeping with the spirit of the argument. The noun ἥττημα suggests that one is comparatively less successful ("lacking").²⁰ "*lagging behind*" expresses the metaphorical idea.

These examples illustrate the kinds of historically viable translation alternatives that are available, offering both metaphorical continuity and argumentative consistency. In spite of being obstructed to some degree by the prevailing translations, many have been able to stay the course in their interpretations. In the verses that follow, that course is harder to maintain.

"But if Some of the Branches were Broken Off"?

The positive, temporary image maintained in the metaphor of walking and eventually arriving at the intended destination accompanied by more fellow travelers than originally set out, even if some trip along the way, is quickly undermined by the translation of the extended metaphor (allegory) that follows it vv. 17-24. In this allegory, the olive tree is represented with some branches *removed*. Although Paul insisted that his fellow Israelites should never be described as "fallen," he now ostensibly portrays them--according to the prevailing translations--as already "broken off."

This allegory has generally been interpreted to indicate that Israelites who are not Christ-followers have been removed from covenant standing and must therefore join the people of God anew, just like non-Israelites, by turning to God through Christ. And that idea appears to be confirmed when Paul insists at the end of the allegory that "*God is able to graft them in again*" (vv. 23-24). That was certainly how Calvin understood this allegory.

Calvin's commentaries incorporated on the frontispiece an illustration of God pruning off branches from an olive tree, some in a state of falling and others already on the ground, while at the same time a few wild shoots were pictured grafted into the places from where these branches have been cut.²¹ That imagery strikingly contradicts the message and image of stumbling but not falling maintained in the previous metaphor. Does Paul mean to communicate that these Israelites have been already *removed*, when he has just insisted that they have *not fallen* in the previous metaphor, or that they stand in need of being grafted back in?

At the risk of being accused of trying to save Paul, I propose that the olive tree allegory has been misunderstood and mistranslated, in addition to being inadequate to the task to which Paul sought to put it. Allegories, like all analogies, are imperfect, and can be taken in various directions other than those the author developing them might have intended or anticipated.²² I suggest that has been the case.

The message of the olive tree allegory is a warning to the non-Israelites in Rome about their own precarious and potentially temporary place alongside of Israelites, including those who

²⁰ LSJ, *Lexicon*, 780; Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 13.22; 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.

²¹ Cf. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (ed. and transl. J. Owen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 425.

²² Cf. Max Black, "More About Metaphor," in *Metaphor and Thought* (ed. A. 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. A. Ortony), 284-324.

do not yet share Paul and the audience's convictions about Christ. *It was designed to warn them not to become arrogant toward those Israelites or to suppose that they have replaced them, but instead to focus on their own faithfulness to the proposition to which they have professed allegiance. They are to be grateful for the grace received from God, and thus to think graciously toward the other, who likewise depends upon God's grace. They have joined alongside those already in a long-standing covenant relationship with God, albeit some in a temporary state of discipline within that relationship. They are to keep in mind that if some of those who are in a long-standing covenant relationship are (so far) slow to recognize the course that faithfulness calls them to take, how much more might it be expected to be a challenge for those who are not accustomed to the ways of God, and specifically, to being faithful to their calling within such a covenant, which involves the service of God and others, not themselves. Hence, the message overall is summed up in the warning to the wild shoot if it should suppose it has replaced some natural branches in God's tree, captured in the *KJV* translation: "Be not highminded, but fear!" (v. 20).²³*

The olive tree allegory can communicate this message, in continuity with the metaphor of stumbling, by focusing on its purpose to portray the precarious state of the non-Israelite among the people of God, and not the state of the Israelites, except as it serves the *a fortiori* ("all the more") case Paul otherwise seeks to make to curtail any temptation toward arrogance among his non-Israelite addressees.²⁴ Several translation alternatives can also help make this clear.²⁵

Since they are represented as "broken off" (ἐξεκλάσθησαν, from ἐκκλάω) in the prevailing English translations, one does not expect to immediately read that the wild shoot has been grafted "among" these branches. The *NRSV* inexplicably obscures the matter even more, even reverses the point, by introducing the replacement theology idea that the wild shoot has been grafted "in their place," which represents a decision without any Greek manuscript evidence. But even if properly translated as grafted "among them" (ἐν αὐτοῖς), such as in the *KJV* and *NASB* (*NIV*: "among the others"), in order to maintain Greek gender consistency (masc.) this pronoun refers back to the wild shoot as grafted among the "branches [κλάδων]," the same branches traditionally presented as "broken off"! How is the reader to imagine a wild shoot grafted "among them" if the branches have been broken "off" from the tree? Here we confront an anomaly that should send translators searching for a logical solution. And there is one readily available.

²³ In keeping with the imagery, this might be expanded to read, "Do not think as if higher [than some of these natural branches], but be full of fear [humbly mindful of just how all the more tenuous is your own unnatural place in this tree]."

²⁴ In spite of the widely held view that Paul is describing non-Israelites being grafted into Israel, understood to mean becoming members of Israel, note that Paul does not describe the trunk or the tree or the roots as Israel; actually, he does not identify them at all. Israelites are natural branches. Note too that the branch from a wild olive tree is a single shoot grafted "among them." It is this shoot that Paul warns of its precarious position in the tree; thus the tree overall seems to represent a concept of the joint people of God, with members from the other nations alongside of Israel, but not thereby becoming members of Israel, but joint members of the one people of God drawn from all of the nations. For full discussion of Paul's theological view that non-Israelites remain non-Israelites and Israelites remain Israelites, see Mark D. Nanos, "Paul and the Jewish Tradition: The Ideology of the Shema," in *Celebrating Paul. Festschrift in Honor of Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J.* (ed. Peter Spitaler; CBQMS; Washington D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2012), 62-80; online earlier paper presented: <http://www.marknanos.com/Paul-Shema-10-27-08.pdf>.

²⁵ For details, see Nanos "Broken Branches."

The verb (ἐκκλάω) that Paul uses in vv. 17-21 can be translated "broken" as in "bent!"²⁶ This was the choice made in the John Wycliffe English translation from the Latin Vulgate in the late fourteenth century, although not adapted thereafter.²⁷ That description would make sense of the image of a wild shoot planted among the branches of the tree, albeit in various states, some of them in some way suffering harm or damage. Broken limbs would also correspond to the idea of stumbling but not having fallen upon which Paul insisted in the prior imagery, whereas "broken off" aligns with the notion of having *fallen*, in direct conflict with Paul's implicit and overall explicit argument. And it would make sense of Paul's grammar, which portrays the newly grafted single wild shoot "among them."

The notion of branches being "cut off" does arise later in the allegory, however, in vv. 22-24. There Paul introduces the verb ἐκκόπτω, which does indicate being "cut off," in order to severely threaten the target of this allegory, the wild shoot. The wild shoot is warned that it will be "cut off" if it presumes to gloat about the present suffering of some of the natural branches, or to suppose that it has replaced them in God's favor. If natural branches can "fall" for unfaithfulness, then "all the more" can God "also cut off" a wild shoot, a turn of phrase that plays off of the fact that the wild shoot has already suffered the unnatural experience of being "cut off" from a wild tree in order to be grafted among the branches that have grown naturally on the cultivated tree.²⁸

Although Paul does not actually state that the natural branches have been cut off, it is implied when warning the wild shoot to avoid being cut off "also." During this warning, he also mentions that some natural branches "fell [πεσόντας]" (v. 22) as the result of God's severe action toward those who were unfaithful, in order to call the wild shoot to remain faithful. But that the stumbling Israelites have fallen is precisely what Paul denied adamantly in the previous metaphor; declaring in v. 11, "May it never be!" Why Paul mixed his metaphors here (if that is what he did) is anything but clear, although it is a common problem when multiple metaphors are present, not least in Isaiah 27-29, from which Paul has drawn throughout chapter 9--11.

This choice of language suggesting the natural branches have already been severed has certainly shaped the prevailing translation and interpretive decisions throughout the allegory and the chapter. The conclusion is that Paul meant to communicate that some natural branches have been broken off; hence, fallen off of the tree. Need that remain the case?

The interpretive tradition has focused on the allegory as a description of the state of Israel (or some Israelites) rather than the state of the wild shoot (representing the non-Israelite

²⁶ In Leviticus 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]"; in other words, it was "bent," "dislocated," "broken," but not removed from his foot (Loeb; transl. W. H. S. Jones).

²⁷ This is the only English translation of which I am aware that maintains "broken" but not "off" for ἐκκλάω in vv. 17-21. It was based on the Latin Vulgate (*Quod si aliqui ex ramis fracti ["broken," "fractured"] sunt, tu autem cum oleaster esses, insertus es in illis* [Clementine edition]): "What if ony of the braunchis ben brokun"; it also translates the wild branch "art graffid among hem," changing to "kit down" for ἐκκόπτω vv. 22-24. The Catholic Douay-Rheims Bible is also based on the Vulgate, and the other exception I know of presently: it translates v. 17 as "broken" but not "off," however, in vv. 19 and 20 it fails to maintain that distinction, writing "broken off" (from the 1899 American edition, which is based on the revisions made by Challoner in 1749-1752; original version dates to 1582).

²⁸ It is rightly often noted that in this allegory Paul reverses the normal oleicultural practice of cutting shoots from cultivated olive trees to graft onto wild olive trees, which will then bear eatable olives, while a wild shoot grafted onto a cultivated tree will not bear eatable olives. Cf. Theophrastus, *Caus. plant.* 1.6.10; 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.

addressees). It has also conflated the more severe "cut off" (ἐκκόπτω) introduced in vv. 22-24 to describe the hypothetical fate that the wild shoot must avoid with the "broken" (ἐκκλάω) state used to describe some of the natural branches in vv. 17-21. Although the inference from introducing the idea of the wild shoot being "cut off" complicates the picture, the translations "broken" or "bent" in vv. 17-21 would help the reader retain the distinction between the present temporary state of some of the branches and the *a fortiori* inference that arises from the warning to the wild shoot about its own precarious state, since it would be "all the more" natural for it to be "cut off," being already "cut off" from another tree in order to be grafted in.

Paul seems to have sensed the problem introduced by the shift in his language when making his *a fortiori* case about the greater danger to themselves that the wild branch should recognize, rather than suppose its superiority. For he immediately insists that the Israelites branches would *also* be able to be grafted back in, all the more logically so, if branches not natural to the tree can be grafted into it. Ironically, it is at this point--when Paul seeks to save his allegory from a wrong inference about the state of the natural branches after making the case for the all the more logically dangerous state of the wild shoot--that his appeal to an unnatural interference in the process has decisively shaped the translation and interpretation of the allegory in precisely the opposite direction than he sought to communicate with respect to the *temporary* but *protected* (as we will see in the next section) state of the natural branches.

What Paul describes is not natural, but miraculous: one does not sever limbs from a tree with the intention of grafting them back into the same tree, and that does not seem to make sense of Paul's choice of metaphors here (or in those that precede and follow it). Does it not appear that Paul has gotten his allegory into a bit of a jam, and that he must appeal to a miracle in order to keep it from suggesting that the state of these Israelites is other than temporary--which is important to the message he wants the non-Israelites in Rome to draw from this chapter?

There are good lexical and grammatical reasons to revise the traditional translations as well as the interpretive implications that have generally been deduced to suggest that these Israelites have been cut off from God, or from their covenant standing. From Paul's point of view some have been unfaithful to their covenant responsibilities and are suffering the disciplinary results. But he wants to highlight that this state (or stage) is temporary, that he believes it will eventually result in their restoration. Therefore, he argues that while his non-Israelite audience has become aware of their own receipt of God's grace and at the same time become aware that some Israelites are suffering discipline from God, their own best interests will only be realized when this temporary, anomalous, disciplinary development has finished its course with the restoration of both Israel and the nations.

Although things have not turned out as Paul proposed that they would ("yet," many uphold), is it not time to make a change here in the way that this text is translated and interpreted? Would that not be faithful to Paul's historical purpose and better serve those who aspire to improve the options for Christian perceptions of and discussions about their Jewish neighbors? If not, why not?

"A Hardening has come upon Part of Israel"?

Paul turns to address his audience more directly in v. 25 as "brothers (and sisters)," instead of continuing in allegorical terms to discuss them indirectly as a wild shoot, yet he appears to continue to draw metaphorically upon the allegory he has just finished for his choice of expressions. One can hardly recognize this from the prevailing English translations. Moreover, the translation choices undermine the thrust of Paul's rather bluntly stated purpose to nip in the

bud any incipient arrogance toward the Israelites under discussion: "So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are" (NRSV). Instead, they describe the state of Israel (or some Israelites) in language that suggests Paul is analogizing their state with the heart of Pharaoh, famously judged as "hardened." That hardly comports with the spirit of his argument, and this strikingly negative judgment of their state undermines the appeals often made to this passage to make otherwise positive statements about Paul's views of his fellow Israelites. Must it be so?

The connection with Pharaoh's heart and associated judgments of what is supposedly wrong with these Israelites are a regular feature of the interpretive tradition, but Paul does not use the Greek word used to describe Pharaoh's heart (σκληρός). Rather, he chooses a very different word (πώρωσις). English translations do not indicate this distinction at all, but it is telling. Πώρωσις (verb πωρώω) is usually used as a medical term to refer to a "callus" (verb: "to callus").²⁹ While a callus involves hardening, that is not a negative attribute for a damaged limb. Unlike the negative case of hardening of a heart, it is a positive one! A callus promotes healing, protecting the injured area so that life can be conducted in and through it, thus serving the interests of the overall body (or plant), so that it can be restored (saved, healed, rescued).

There are several reasons to suggest translating Paul's language in v. 25 around "callus" rather than "harden." In addition to the imagery of a tree in the allegory just completed, it is supported by the metaphorical appeal to plant imagery detectable in Paul's use of other language throughout vv. 25-26a. He writes in the next clause of v. 25 about the time when the "fullness [πλήρωμα]" of the nations will arrive, which is just the way that full blooming or fruitfulness is described for plants.³⁰ In the clause after that, v. 26a, the ultimate goal is described as the "salvation [σωθήσεται]" of all Israel, in metaphorical plant terms, its "healing" or "restoration."³¹ Moreover, the passages of Isaiah 27 and 59 from which he draws to create the proofs of this process for Israel in vv. 26-27 are full of just this kind of plant imagery.³²

Another reason to translate Paul's language here around the metaphorical appeal to a protective callus being formed to ensure the eventual restoration of the broken or bent branches and the tree overall, arises in the modifying phrase ἀπὸ μέρους, usually translated "part of" Israel, or Israel "partially." Traditionally, the prepositional phrase ἀπὸ μέρους is either translated to indicate that some Israelites have been hardened, as in the *NRSV* ("a hardening has come upon *part of* Israel"), or that Israel itself has been hardened to some degree, as in the *NASB* ("a *partial hardening* has happened to Israel") and *NIV* ("Israel has experienced a hardening *in part*").³³ But the phrase ἀπὸ μέρους can be translated to highlight the time element of what is happening: it "has happened *for a while*."³⁴ In Rom 15:24, Paul writes of the fact that he will stay in Rome "for a while [ἀπὸ μέρους]," that is, "temporarily," before he heads off to Spain.

This apparently overlooked option would keep the focus on the temporary nature of the anomalous events that Paul here discloses as a "mystery" to date in order to communicate that things will not turn out as they might appear presently to be, but very differently. The clause about the callus that has happened to or been formed for Israel is followed by two clauses having

²⁹ Hippocrates, *De alimento* 53; *De fractures* 23.10; *De articulis* 14.17, 24; 15.6; 49.18. Celsus, *De Medicina*. Aretaeus; Galen, *Ars Medica* 1.387.18; LSJ, *Lexicon*, 1561.

³⁰ Theophrastus, *Caus. plant.* 1.13.3 (line 3), 9 (line 6); 3.15.3 (line 10).

³¹ Theophrastus, *Caus. plant.* 1.4.5 (line 8); 1.7.2 (line 7); 1.19.5 (line 7); 1.22.2 (line 8); 2.16.5 (line 1); 2.17.5 (line 12); 5.16.2; 5.18.4 (line 3).

³² It is also found in many other places in Isaiah from which he draws elsewhere in Romans; see Nanos, "Callus."

³³ Emphases added.

³⁴ Cf. Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 67.109.

to do with stages in a process or developments over the course of time. This callus will last "until the fullness of the nations commences, and *then* (or: and *thus*) all Israel will be restored."

Whether one prefers to emphasize the process or the element of time, there are several translation options to explore for this clause. "For a while" emphasizes the time element over the developmental aspect, but either or both aspects can be expressed by the adjective "temporary," or the adverb, "temporarily." We might translate the clause in any of the following ways: "that a callus has formed for Israel *for a while*," or, "that a *temporary* callus has formed for Israel," or, "that a callus has formed for Israel *temporarily*," or, in keeping with Paul's word order: "that a callus *temporarily* has formed for Israel." The purpose of this temporary development is on behalf of Israel, to protect Israel from harm until the promised restoration comes to pass: "a callus temporarily has formed for [the protection] of Israel!"

All of these options still represent a value judgment on the part of Paul about those Israelites who do not share his convictions about Jesus and thus about the appropriateness of announcing him as the Christ to the nations, which is integral to Paul's rhetorical purpose for engaging in this argument. Yet at the same time they represent a much more respectful view of his compatriots, are in keeping with the kind of judgments of the temporary state of many Israelites commonly made by Israelite prophets, and offer a much more promising translation for those engaged in rethinking Christian perceptions of and discussions about Jews who do not share their convictions about Jesus Christ.

It has always been strikingly discordant to encounter (and even to use!) "hardened" in descriptions of Paul's views of his fellow Israelites, whether in part or partially, in statements otherwise developed towards asserting that Paul held a positive view of his fellow Jews. Is there a good reason not to make this alternative, historically viable option available in the translations upon which those who can only read English depend (*mutatis mutandis*, in any other language translations for those readers), and to raise it within interpretive discussions of this text and these topics?

"Enemies for your Sake? Even, "Enemies of God"?"

Following the appeal to proof texts in vv. 26-27 to demonstrate the certainty of "all" Israel's restoration, in vv. 28-29 Paul takes another pass at explaining why this outcome is beyond doubt, as well as why the unanticipated way in which it is unfolding ("a mystery") is to the benefit of his non-Israelite audience in the meantime, and thus, why they must not hold these Israelites in contempt. Yet once again there are translation decisions, in addition to interpretive ones, that mitigate if not entirely subvert the thrust of Paul's argument.³⁵ For example, the *NRSV* translates this two-verse sentence in the following manner: "As regards the gospel they are *enemies of God* for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (emphasis added).

There is no manuscript evidence for the addition of the phrase "of God," none, and the prevailing translations avoid this egregious decision by usually writing: "enemies for your sake" (*NASB, NIV, KJV* ["sakes"]). Although the English reader can see that this representation of these Israelites as "enemies" is qualified with respect to the gospel, and although that can be understood in various ways, what the translations fail to help them recognize is that the Greek

³⁵ Traced in Joseph Sievers, "A History of the Interpretation of Romans 11:29," *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 14 (1997) 381-442; idem, "'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* (ed. C. Grenholm and D. Patte; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 127-73.

word ἐχθροὶ translated "enemies" is an adjective. It mirrors the word ἀγαπητοὶ, translated properly in the next clause as an adjective, "beloved."³⁶

In other words, Paul's point is not that they are enemies of God or that God is the enemy of them, or even that they are enemies of the non-Israelite addressees, but that they have been temporarily "enemied," that is, "alienated" or "estranged" by God for the sake of these non-Israelites. If they are suffering vicariously "for your sake," that ought to induce empathy--which is more in keeping with the point of Paul's argument here and throughout! This state is temporary, Paul insists, because they are beloved by God through their covenant standing as children of the fathers. Paul spelled out some of the irrevocable gifts to which he alludes in 9:4-5: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah...." (NRSV).

The translation *estranged* expresses the idea that has been central to Paul's assessment of some of his fellow Israelites throughout the chapter (such as "stumbling," "broken" or "bent"): they are suffering God's discipline temporarily, but will be restored, according to God's covenant promises to Israel. Of that eventual outcome Paul is certain--otherwise God would not be faithful to those *within* the covenant already made. It is in this light that he wraps up his argument to his non-Israelite audience about the need to focus on their own faithfulness, carried out with respect for the fact that God is dealing with Israel according to God's own designs for how all of humankind will be best served in the end, however inscrutable it may seem to them along the way (vv. 30-36). According to Paul, the time for Christ-followers to judge the fate of Israelites, if there is even to be such a day, has certainly not yet arrived.

Conclusion

There are undoubtedly many reasons that translation committees have not yet revised the translation of the language choices made in Romans 11. Why that might be is not the focus of the discussion offered here, but it is worth asking if it is not, at least in part, simply a matter of what John McWhorter labels "Path Dependence."³⁷ That is, what may seem normal and even self-evidently justified today can represent a choice made previously in a particular place and time that was shaped by very different factors. Once established and repeated, it tends to persist and even discourage consideration of alternatives. And that continues, often without special concern expressed, even when other changes might suggest the need for reconsideration.

For example, keyboards for word processing continue to be designed according to the arrangement adapted for typewriters, which involved decisions to put certain letters where they would help avoid jams created when typing fast, and offer salespeople an easy way to type the word "typewriter" by using keys conveniently available in the top row. This keyboard arrangement, which came to be known as QWERTY, continues in spite of the fact that computer keyboards do not suffer from the problem of such mechanical jamming. McWhorter draws from this and other examples to point out the obvious: many present conditions are not the product of present day choices, but (and for any number of reasons) they often represent decisions made in

³⁶ 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).

³⁷ "Path Dependence." Accessed Jan. 29, 2012: <http://edge.org/response-detail/1515/what-scientific-concept-would-improve-everybodys-cognitive-toolkit>.

the past under different conditions--even when those might be counterproductive to our best interests today.

It is not hard to recognize that those who translated and interpreted Romans in earlier periods, from Chrysostom to Augustine to Luther and Calvin to the English translation committees preceding Vatican II, were all interested in this passage for different reasons and with different sensibilities toward the topic of Paul's view of Jews and Judaism. It is harder to understand why the committees since then, which have almost certainly included some members who shared these new concerns and sentiments, have not done so in a more concerted way. Certainly some of the factors for any translation chosen include familiarity, tradition, the assumption that previous committees had investigated the options, that these choices are constrained by the meaning of the Greek words and grammar already thoroughly considered, and the force of habit. But theological disposition is a factor too, which has, at least for many on this matter, undergone substantial reconsideration.

In view of recent encouraging developments in Christian sensibilities and perceptions of, teachings about, and policies toward Jews and Judaism, combined with developments in historical research that offer the opportunity to present these texts in more historically probable ways, is it not time to challenge translation committees, commentators, and other interpreters of these texts, not least ourselves as interpreters of Paul--Christian, or not--to reexamine the alternatives and reconsider the choices made for English (and other language) translations and interpretations of this critically important text?