

Appendix 2
The Olive Tree in Romans 11
and
The Commonwealth of Israel in
Ephesians 2

Part I: The Olive Tree in Romans 11

The first passage that indicates there is a sense, however limited, in which Gentiles as individuals during the interadvent period become part of national Israel is Romans 11:16-24, the olive tree metaphor.

The view suggested in chapter 5 is that the olive tree in Romans 11 represents national Israel. It is not a common view, so this appendix details the evidence that I believe leads to this conclusion.

The Parallel between the Two Metaphors

The first point and foundation of the argument is found in verse 16:

If the first piece of *dough* is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too.

The two metaphors or analogies are clearly in parallel with each other: "first piece of dough" (or "firstfruits") and "lump" (remaining bulk of dough) correspond to the "root" and "branches," respectively. The Greek is more concise, and the parallel is even easier to see:

ει δε η απαρχη αγια και το φυραμα

"But if the firstfruits [be] holy, also the lump"

και ει η ριζα αγια και οι κλαδοι

"And if the root [be] holy, also the branches"

Therefore, there can be no question that the "firstfruits" and "root" symbolize or represent the same thing. That is also true of the "lump" and "branches."

Metaphor 1: Firstfruits and Lump

Concerning metaphor one, the firstfruits and the lump, there is little doubt about its OT background in Numbers 15:17-21:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you enter the land where I bring you, then it shall be, that when you eat of the food of the land, you shall lift up an offering to the LORD. Of the first of your dough you shall lift up a cake as an offering; as the offering of the threshing floor, so you shall lift it up. From the first of your dough you shall give to the LORD an offering throughout your generations.'"

The first of the dough (the "firstfruits") was to be baked as a cake and offered to Yahweh. There is also little disagreement that this consecration of the firstfruits to Yahweh implied the consecration or "holiness" of the entire lump of dough: "The first of the dough given unto the Lord meant the consecration of the whole lump."¹

Metaphor 2: The Root and the Branches

The terms "root" (ριζα, vv. 16, 17, 18) and "branches" (plural of κλαδος, vv. 16, 17, 18, 19, 21) do not identify the kind of tree Paul has in mind. However, from his use of αγριελαιος ("wild olive tree," vv. 17, 24) and καλλιελαιος ("cultivated olive tree," v. 24), it is clear that the metaphor image he develops is an olive tree. The root of both words is ελαια ("olive tree" or "olive," the fruit of the olive tree) used alone in verses 17 and 24.

1 Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:85.

Identifying the Referents of the Two Metaphors

The Identity of the Firstfruits and Lump

The context is clear that Paul is discussing national Israel in Romans 11: he uses "His people" in verse 1, "His people whom He foreknew" in verse 2, and "Israel" in verses 7 and 11, which is then followed by "their rejection" and "their acceptance" in verse 15. Therefore, the metaphor that immediately follows in verse 16 must have reference to this same group. With Godet, I believe the "firstfruits" and "lump" of verse 16 have the following referents: the patriarchs and the nation of Israel, respectively:

The Jewish people are *consecrated to God* by their very origin--that is to say, by the call of Abraham, which included theirs (ver. 29)...We must therefore, with the majority of commentators, take these holy first-fruits as *the patriarchs*, in whose person all their posterity are radically consecrated to the mission of being the salvation-people; comp. ix. 5 and xi. 28.²

Stern points out the appropriateness of this metaphor as a symbol for the patriarchs and the nation of Israel that came from them: since the firstfruits are offered first, this image suggests something chronologically anterior with regard to what it symbolizes. Thus the people who trusted first must be either Abraham or all the patriarchs.³ The people who trusted after them would be those who came from them, namely, national Israel.

Not all scholars, however, agree with this view of the firstfruits and lump. Horner takes the firstfruits to be the remnant (v. 5) and the whole lump as the nation as a whole (vv. 12, 26):

The holiness of the first part extends to the full lump of dough. Hence the salvation blessing of the Jewish 'remnant' (v. 5) extends to the salvation blessing of the 'full number' (v. 12) of all Israel

2 Frederic Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 404-05 (emphasis original).

3 Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 413.

(v. 26)."⁴

Everett F. Harrison takes the same view but admits the second part of verse 16 presents a "difficulty" to his view.⁵ The problem is the parallel noted above between the two metaphors: the firstfruits correspond to the root, and the whole lump corresponds to the branches. However, if the root symbolizes the patriarchs, as Harrison himself agrees, the two symbols--firstfruits and root--represent two different things. The same problem applies to the second part of each metaphor. Everett then pleads his case for taking the firstfruits as the remnant instead of the patriarchs by suggesting that the last clause (about the root and branches) "looks forward rather than backward." In other words, there really is no parallel between the two metaphors. I submit that this "difficulty" negates his interpretation of the first metaphor. Both of the two metaphors must have the same referents. To conclude otherwise simply does violence to the text of verse 16.

Thus if the referents of the two metaphors must be the same, additional evidence for the suggested interpretation of the first metaphor comes from an examination of the much more fully developed second metaphor.

The Identity of the Root and Branches

Verse 16 is Paul's only mention of the first metaphor, the firstfruits and the lump. However, the second metaphor is developed by him at some length in verses 17-24.

In verses 1-7 and again in 25-29--the sections before and after the olive-tree metaphor in verses 16-24--Paul argues that the bulk of national Israel is in a state of unbelief or "hardening" (vv. 7 and 25), leaving only a remnant of national Israel in belief (vv. 5 and 7). In addition he argues that this bulk of national Israel currently in unbelief will yet be saved "when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (vv. 25-26). If verses 16-24 are to fit within this sustained argument of Paul, then the "branches" that are broken off the olive tree for unbelief (v. 20; cf. v. 17) and the believing "branches" that

4 Horner, *Future Israel*, p. 258.

5 Everett F. Harrison, *Romans*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), X:121.

remain on the tree must represent these two segments of national Israel, and thus all the branches together represent the entirety of the nation of Israel. The branches broken off are called "natural branches" in verses 21 and 24, and the cultivated olive tree is called "their own olive tree" in verse 24. Therefore the "branches" that remain on the tree must also be "natural branches" of the cultivated olive tree. It is among these remaining branches that the Gentiles are grafted (v. 17).

Based on this conclusion, the "root" of verses 16, 17, and 18 can now be identified. Two arguments suggest that the root represents the patriarchs.

First, consider verse 28. Once the unbelief and hardening is removed from the bulk of national Israel, the previously broken-off natural branches are grafted back into their own olive tree (vv. 24-26). Although now they are enemies, God will do this for them because "they are loved on account of the patriarchs," Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v. 28). Thus the natural branches are linked to the patriarchs. Since in the metaphor the natural branches have an obvious connection to the root of the olive tree, the root must therefore be the patriarchs.⁶

Second, consider the blessing of the natural branches that remain on the tree and the blessing of the wild branches grafted into the tree. The root must refer to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for it was through them that the Abrahamic covenant came, which in turn promised blessing not only to Israel--the "seed" of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob--but also to the Gentiles. This is the blessing in view in the metaphor. Note the expressions: the wild branches share "the rich root of the olive tree" (v. 17) and "the root supports you [Gentiles]" (v. 18), to whom Paul is writing.

Murray makes the following comment:

In the application of this figure 'the firstfruit'

6 Harold W. Hoehner, "Israel in Romans 9-11," p. 152-3: "The root probably has reference to Abraham and/or the patriarchs for verse 28 speaks of Israel being 'beloved for the fathers' sake.'" Also, John Knox, *The Epistle to the Romans*, in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols., gen. ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), 9:571: "...the root (cf. Jer. 11:16-17) can refer only to the patriarchs in the covenant-making period in the life of the Hebrew nation (cf. 9:5 and 11:28)" (emphasis original).

is the patriarchs rather than the remnant. The firstfruit and the lump are parallel to the root and the branches. The root is surely the patriarchs. Furthermore, in verse 28 Israel are [sic] said to be 'beloved for the fathers' sake'. In the one case it is the consecration belonging to Israel, in the other it is the love borne to Israel. But both are derived from the patriarchal parentage.⁷

Charles Hodge writes similarly:

By the first-fruits and the root are to be understood the source of the Jewish people, i.e. their ancestors [the patriarchs]; and by the lump and branches the residue of the nation. The meaning therefore is, 'If the ancestors [patriarchs] of the Jews were holy, so are their descendants.' The word *holy* does not in this case mean *morally pure*, but *consecrated*, separated to the special service of God."⁸

Note, however, that both sides in the debate over whether the firstfruits represent the patriarchs or the remnant agree that the point of metaphor one is to picture or symbolize the complete and ever-abiding consecration of the nation of Israel as a whole, thus implying its ultimate salvation. Murray concludes his statement as follows:

Here again we are apprized [sic] of the distinguishing character of Israel in the relation of God to them and of his counsel respecting them. The fact of consecration derived from the patriarchs [symbolized by the "firstfruits"] is introduced here by the apostle as support for the ultimate recovery of Israel. There cannot be irremediable rejection of Israel; the holiness of theocratic consecration is

7 Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:85. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 538, takes the same view: "If the patriarchs--the first fruits and the root--are holy, so is the whole people." Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 405, points out that "some fathers (Or., Theod.) apply this emblem ["firstfruits"] to *Christ*, as assuring the conversion of the people from whom He sprang. But this reasoning would apply equally to Gentile humanity, since Jesus is a man, not only a Jew. We must therefore, with the majority of commentators, take these holy first-fruits as *the patriarchs...*" (emphasis original).

8 Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 274 (emphasis original).

not abolished and will one day be vindicated in Israel's fullness and restoration.⁹

In order to show this consecration of the entirety of national Israel, Paul selected the metaphor of the firstfruits as his first metaphor. Godet points out the reason why he then offers a second metaphor:

But this figure, by which the entire nation was compared to a lump of dough consecrated to God, did not furnish the apostle with the means of distinguishing between Jews and Jews, between those who had faithfully preserved this national character and those who had obliterated it by their personal unbelief. Thus he is obliged to add a second figure, that he may be able to make the distinction which he must here lay down between those two so different portions of the nation. There is therefore no need to seek a different meaning for the second figure from that of the first.¹⁰

The interpretation of the two metaphors, then, seems clear: the firstfruits and the root of the cultivated olive tree both represent the patriarchs, and the "whole batch" and branches of this olive tree both represent national Israel.¹¹

The Olive Tree

National Israel, "His people whom He foreknew," is the central or most prominent theme that runs through Romans

9 Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:85. Similarly, Knox, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 571: "The 'first dough,' like the 'root,' is the fathers of Israel, through whom the whole nation is consecrated." Also, Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 404: "The apostle proves in this passage [vv. 16-24] the perfect congruity, from the viewpoint of Israelitish antecedents, of the event which he has just announced [in v. 15] as the consummation of Israel's history. Their future restoration is in conformity with the holy character impressed on them from the first; it is therefore not only possible, but morally necessary (ver. 16)."

10 Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 405.

11 Alford, *The Greek Testament*, II:430: "...the ἀπαρχή and ρίζα [firstfruits and root] have generally been taken to represent the patriarchs; and I believe rightly (except that perhaps it would be more strictly correct to say, *Abraham himself*)" (emphasis original); II:431: "Then, *who are indicated by the φουραμα and the κλαδοι* [the lump and the branches]? ISRAEL, considered as the people of God" (emphasis original).

chapter 11. Paul's goals are to refute the notion that God might have permanently cast away his people Israel and to explain Israel's current unbelief in view of the covenants and promises God made to this nation in the Old Testament. In the course of this discussion, he also argues that at this point in history God has sent salvation to the Gentiles in order to provoke Israel to jealousy and draw them back to himself. Israel is center stage in every sense.

The previous sections of this appendix have argued at some length that the natural branches of the cultivated olive tree represent national Israel. However, since there is relatively little disagreement on the identity of the natural branches, the question asked by most commentators is not what the branches represent but what the *olive tree* represents. The answers given, of course, are many and varied: for example, Israel,¹² "true Israel,"¹³ the kingdom of God,¹⁴ the Abrahamic Covenant,¹⁵ and "the place of spiritual blessing."¹⁶ Different theological conclusions are drawn from this passage on the basis of the answers given for the identity of the olive tree itself. Also, to some extent at least, theological systems seem at times to be the basis for the answer given to the question.

Before attempting an answer to the question of the identity of the cultivated olive tree, a prior question must first be addressed: Does Paul's metaphor allow the olive tree to have an independent symbolic meaning separate and distinct from the meaning of the root and branches? The evidence is quite strong that the answer is no. Consider the following two observations.

Context: Paul's Focus in the Metaphor

It is commonplace in hermeneutics not to assign every detail of extended figures such as parables and allegories

12 E.g., Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:85, and Harrison, *Romans*, p. 121.

13 E.g., Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1945), p. 109, and Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 538.

14 E.g., Eric Sauer, *From Eternity to Eternity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p. 158.

15 E.g., Horner, *Future Israel*, p. 272.

16 E.g., Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, p. 744, and Culver, *Systematic Theology*, p. 855.

a specific symbolic significance.¹⁷ Verse 16 makes it clear that Paul's focus is on the "root" and "the branches." The metaphor or allegory of the olive tree¹⁸ (vv. 17-24) is simply constructed to service those two symbols, and these symbols are relatively easy to identify. To press some other detail in Paul's metaphor, such as the olive tree per se, for an independent, symbolic meaning distinct from the root and branches is highly dubious. It is even more dubious if the symbolic meaning assigned to such a detail is the very basis for interpreting the entire metaphor. Nevertheless, this is precisely what most analyses of the metaphor do: the overall interpretation of the metaphor is based on the meaning assigned to the olive tree itself, distinct from the meaning of the root and branches. This is an illegitimate method of interpretation. Some interpreters even speak of a "trunk."¹⁹ To import a detail not even mentioned by Paul, much less give it some symbolic significance, is definitely illegitimate.

For the remainder of this discussion, it is most important to note that the "branches" of verse 16 represent the entire nation of Israel--both the unbelieving segment and the believing remnant. Since for Paul the two focal points of this metaphor are the "root" and "branches," this means that it is the nation of Israel as a whole that is of primary significance, not the broken-off branches by themselves, not the remnant by itself, and certainly not the Gentiles.

Exegesis: "Branches" and "Olive Tree" are Used Interchangeably

Here is a catalog of the relevant Greek words and the verses in which they are used (the translations are mine):

ρίζα: "root"

16: if the root [is] holy, also the branches

17: grafted in among them and joint-partaker of the root

18: you bear not the root, but the root you

17 See, for example, A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), pp. 230-235.

18 An allegory is generally considered an extended metaphor, while a parable is an extended simile. Some scholars refer to Paul's olive tree as a metaphor, others an allegory.

19 For example, Culver, *Systematic Theology*, p. 855.

κλαδος: "branch"

- 16: if the root [is] holy, also the branches
- 17: if some of the branches were broken off
- 18: do not boast over the branches
- 19: branches were broken off in order that I might be grafted in
- 21: if God did not spare the natural branches ["the according-to-nature branches"]

καλλιελαιος: "cultivated olive tree"

- 24: were grafted into a cultivated olive tree

αγριελαιος: "wild olive tree"

- 17: you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them
- 24: if you were cut out of the wild olive tree according to nature

ελαια: "olive tree" or "olive"

- 17: joint-partaker of the root [and (variant)] of the fatness of the olive tree
- 24: grafted into their own olive tree

εγκεντριζω: "to graft"

- 17: you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them
- 19: in order that I might be grafted in
- 23: they will be grafted in
- 23: God is able to graft them in again
- 24: you contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree
- 24: these the-according-to-nature [branches] will be grafted into their own olive tree

First, note the use of αγριελαιος in verse 17. The word means *wild olive tree*,²⁰ and is so used in verse 24. Thus verse 17 literally states that a wild olive tree was grafted into the cultivated olive tree! This, of course, is nonsense, and according to the nature of the image,

20 AG, p. 13.

Paul should have used "wild branches." Yet he used "tree" instead of "branches," which implies that he likely did not make a distinction between the branches and the tree but considered the tree essentially equivalent to the branches. Paul's view here should not be a surprise. When one looks at a "tree," what is it that in general characterizes the tree's distinctiveness? Its branches; they effectively constitute the tree.

Second, note that had Paul used "wild branches" in verse 17 instead of "wild olive tree" (αγριελαιος), there is no doubt that they would represent the Gentiles just as the "natural branches" represent national Israel. Thus, there can also be no doubt that the "wild olive tree" is a substitute for the wild branches and thus plays the role of a symbol for the Gentiles. Why, then, does the same logic not apply to the cultivated olive tree? When convenient, the cultivated olive tree can similarly substitute for the natural branches and thus play the role of a symbol for national Israel.

Therefore, I suggest that in Paul's thought the "olive tree" has no meaning separate and distinct from that of its branches. In turn, since the natural branches, in the view of almost all scholars, represents national Israel, then the "olive tree" has no separate and distinct meaning from national Israel. In the image the tree can, if and when convenient, play an equivalent role to the natural branches. That is, the cultivated olive tree can substitute for the natural branches as a symbol of national Israel, just as the wild olive tree was a substitute for the wild branches as a symbol of the Gentiles in verse 17. If the question, "What does the cultivated olive tree represent?" is raised at all, the answer must be national Israel.

Based on the argumentation here, in the section, "The Olive Tree Analogy" in chapter 5, it was stated that believing Gentiles have been grafted into national Israel. This statement has theological implications, as the following section points out.

The Debate Over the Meaning of the Olive Tree

Despite the contextual and exegetical evidence offered in the previous section on the illegitimacy of assigning a separate meaning to the olive tree distinct from the

meaning of its natural branches, the reason for such assignation and the resulting debate generated by the various suggestions is quite apparent. Some theologians must have the tree as a separate and distinct symbol from its branches in order to reconcile Paul's metaphor with their theological systems.

Example 1: Replacement Theology

This system must have a tree of symbolic significance in order to identify it with "the Christian church" as the "new Israel" or "spiritual Israel." This church or new Israel then has as co-equal members: both believing Jews (the remaining natural branches) and believing Gentiles (the wild branches). In this interpretation, Israel loses all ethnic, national, and territorial distinctives found in her covenants and prophetic promises.

There is, Paul tells us, one good olive tree. Some of the branches are broken off. Branches from a wild olive are grafted in among the branches which remain, that they "may partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree." The new branches represent Gentile Christians. It would be difficult to state more clearly that the Gentiles in entering the Christian Church become members of a body, a church or theocracy, which has its roots in the Abrahamic covenant and to which all true descendants of Abraham belong. The tree represents the true Israel....

Paul has nothing to say about earthly blessings and aims to show that the spiritual blessings promised to Israel are to be secured only by faith, and are the common possession of all believers, both Jew and Gentile. Paul's concern for Israel was not that they might inherit the land of Canaan, but that they might be saved (Rom. x. 1, cf. vs. 9).²¹

21 Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*, p. 108-10. In commenting on this statement by Allis, Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, p. 199, writes, "Nowhere does Paul state that this Olive Tree symbolizes the new or true Israel....Allis must read into this text that the Olive Tree represents 'true Israel,' for his amillennial theology requires him to do just that."

Example 2: Dispensationalism

This system must have a tree of symbolic significance in order to preclude any notion of Gentile believers, who are obviously members of "the church" of which Paul writes frequently in his letters, being grafted into national Israel. In dispensationalism, national Israel and the New Testament church begun at Pentecost are distinct groups.²² In a theological system that posits this distinction, it would be difficult to explain how Gentiles in the church age are grafted into "Israel," especially in fulfillment of predictions of Gentile salvation in the Old Testament. Note, therefore, how Fruchtenbaum needs to assign a meaning to the olive tree itself to avoid Gentiles being grafted into Israel:

The illustration is that of the firstfruit and the root which refer to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the Abrahamic covenant. They are holy because they are separated and consecrated by God for a divine purpose. Israel as a nation is the lump and the branches....

The natural branches are the Jews (Israel) and the wild olive branches are the Gentiles (v. 17). The Olive Tree in this passage does not represent Israel or the Church, but it represents the place of spiritual blessing. The root of this place of blessing is the Abrahamic covenant...The Gentiles, by their faith, have now become partakers of Jewish spiritual blessings. This olive tree represents the place of blessing, and now Gentiles have been grafted into this place of blessing and partaking of its sap. Gentiles have been made partakers of Jewish spiritual blessings as contained in the Abrahamic covenant.²³

22 In his book, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p. 44, Ryrie includes this tenet as the first in the three-fold *sine qua non* of dispensationalism: "A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the Church distinct."

23 Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, pp. 743-44. Other dispensationalists make similar suggestions for the meaning of the olive tree. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, p. 188, states that the olive tree is "the fountain of blessing." Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), p. 214, writes, "The olive tree represents the place of privilege which Israel first occupied."

I agree with dispensationalism in its view of the future for ethnic, national Israel.²⁴ Indeed, as argued at some length in chapter 5, Romans 11 teaches such a restoration for Israel. I also agree that the olive tree is certainly not a symbol for the "church"--some "new" or "spiritual Israel." Rather, I believe it can play the role of a symbol for national Israel, although the natural branches constitute the essential symbol based on verse 16. But as verse 17 indicates, the tree can substitute for the branches in meaning.

The two preceding examples give the impression of a complicated and intricate metaphor over which exegetes have struggled heroically for centuries. However, I suggest that it is theological systems with a polemic need to assign the cultivated olive tree a separate, independent, and distinct meaning from the its natural branches that have made this debate necessary, not the complexity of the metaphor itself. The metaphor is quite simple: there are only two points of focus that have independent meaning--the root and the branches (v. 16). Therefore, for the reasons outlined in this appendix, it remains the simplest and most natural interpretation of this metaphor to identify not only the natural branches as national Israel but also to take any reference to the cultivated olive tree as equivalent to a reference to the natural branches, which in effect constitute the tree.

In addition to the contextual and exegetical arguments presented in the previous section against the legitimacy of this whole attempt to assign a separate and distinct meaning to the olive tree, there are a number of problems that can be cited with the meanings suggested made by dispensationalists.

(1) If it can be agreed that the root represents the patriarchs--real people--it is difficult to see how the tree coming from them is an abstract concept such as "the place of spiritual blessing." The vital, organic link between a root and its tree better pictures the link between the patriarchs and the nation that physically, biologically "grew" out of the patriarchs than it pictures the patriarchs and a patriarchal covenant. The view taken in this appendix represents a nice, clean analogy.

24 I summarize this covenantal and prophetic future for Israel in chapter 5 (section "Israel's Restoration") and in Appendix 3 (section "National Israel").

(2) The Hebrew mind was not much prone to abstractions. Steinsaltz, a talmudic scholar, makes the following statement:

A basic factor [in talmudic thinking] is the attitude toward abstraction. In the Talmud, as in most areas of original Jewish thought, there is deliberate evasion of abstract thinking based on abstract concepts.²⁵

A similar observation is made by Leslie McFall:

The thinking of the Hebrews, like that of other Semitic peoples, was done not in the abstract but in the concrete. Thus we find the material put for the immaterial, the expression for the thought, the instrument for the action, the action for the feeling.²⁶

McFall gives several examples: the Hebrew mind will use "hard of neck" for the abstract "stubborn," "hard of face" for "impudent," and "long hand" for "far-reaching powers" (cf. Isa. 59:1).

Therefore, it is not likely that Paul was thinking of any abstraction when he wrote verses 16-24. It is even less likely that he would construct a symbol of an abstraction. He would much more likely be thinking of a distinct, well-defined, "concrete" object and then create a concrete symbol for it. The preceding context of verses 1-15 makes it clear that the most prominent object in his mind is the nation of Israel. Thus the "branches" in verse 16 represent Israel. To take the cultivated olive tree as a symbol for "the place of spiritual blessing" requires not only that Paul add a third focal point to the metaphor beyond the two mentioned in verse 16, but make it a symbol of an abstraction at that! Since Paul uses *αγριελαιος* ("wild olive tree") as a substitute for *κλαδοι* ("branches") in verse 17, it is far more likely that he views the cultivated olive tree as an equivalent symbol of the same concrete object represented by the natural branches rather than a symbol for some abstract object such as "the place of spiritual blessing." If Paul had

25 Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, p. 230.

26 Leslie McFall, "Hebrew Language," *ISBE*, II:662.

some thought of a "place of spiritual blessing" at all, he would use the concrete nation of Israel for that notion since Israel is, in fact, the source of all God's blessing, both to Jews and Gentiles.

There seems to be no limit to the extremes to which the imagination can reach when thinking up meanings for the cultivated olive tree. "The place of spiritual blessing" is an abstract concept, but as an abstraction it pales in comparison with the suggestion made by Earl D. Radmacher:

This olive tree has been designated by premillennialists as "the place of blessing" or "the place of privilege." Although these terms are both acceptable, perhaps it could more clearly be designated as "the place of privilege as the mediatorial agency of God upon the earth."²⁷

Dismissing this suggestion requires no further comment.

(3) Israel is called an olive tree at least twice in the prophets (Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:6), making it a known symbol of national Israel.

The force of both (1) and (2) is lessened, though not entirely removed, if instead of "the place of spiritual blessing" the tree is taken as a symbol of the Abrahamic covenant itself. A covenant is not quite as abstract, and there is a sense in which this covenant springs from the patriarchs since God made the covenant with them. However, there are at least two objections to this view.

First, objection (1) still retains significant force. Though there is obviously a link between the patriarchs and the Abrahamic covenant, it is not vital, organic as is the link between a root and its tree that grows from it. National Israel does indeed have a vital, organic link to the patriarchs: it physically descended from them. Therefore, the interpretation given the metaphor here fits it better.

Second, it is "his people," "Israel," and the "remnant" (a part of national Israel) that constitute the preceding context for the introduction of the olive tree metaphor

²⁷ Earl D. Radmacher, *The Nature of the Church* (Portland, Oregon: Western Baptist Press, 1972), p. 272.

(vv. 1-15). In these verses, no mention whatever is made of any covenant or even the concept of a covenant. Moreover, nothing about a covenant is introduced within the metaphor itself (vv. 16-24). The only mention of a covenant in the entire chapter is in verses 26-27 where the covenant is advanced as the reason why "all Israel will be saved." Therefore, it is more natural to associate the metaphor with the nation of Israel so prominent in the preceding context.

Therefore, in addition to the illegitimate search for an independent, symbolic meaning for the olive tree per se distinct from the meaning of the root and branches, the symbolic meanings suggested carry with them significant problems.

The Cultivated Olive Tree As National Israel

In support of the conclusions drawn in this appendix, it is worth noting that apparently some scholars have no problem taking the olive tree as a symbol for national Israel. In fact, a few simply make the statement with little or no discussion, almost as if they consider it obvious. Here is a sampling.

Murray:

The figure of the tree with its root and branches is continued throughout these five verses [vv. 17-21] and also in verses 22-24. The figure of the olive tree to describe Israel is in accord with Old Testament usage (cf. Jer. 11:16, 17; Hos. 14:6)...Israel with its rootage in the patriarchs is viewed as the cultivated olive tree (cf. vs. 24) and the Gentiles as the wild olive.²⁸

Harrison:

Here [in vv. 17-24] Paul continues to use the figures of root and branches, enlarging on the theme as to set forth the allegory of the olive tree. Actually, there are two olive trees, the cultivated olive and the wild olive. Israel is the cultivated olive, the Gentiles the wild olive. The breaking off

28 Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:85.

of some of the branches of the former and the grafting in of the branches of the latter represent the present partial rejection of Israel and the corresponding reception of the Gentiles.²⁹

Stern:

This [the point Stern makes on Gal. 6:16] is clear from Ro 11:16-24, where Gentile believers are portrayed as wild olive branches grafted into the rich root of the cultivated olive tree which is Israel, the Jewish people.³⁰

But are there problems with the view suggested here? Since this is not a common view, there is not much in the literature that argues against it. However, I anticipate several objections.

Objection 1: If the cultivated olive tree represents national Israel, dispensationalists might argue that the symbolism breaks down: how can the broken-off natural branches, which also represent Israel, be grafted back into the olive tree--would this not represent the curious concept of Israel grafted into Israel?

In response, it first should be noted that John Murray, at least, sees no problem here. He makes the following two statements with no attempt at reconciliation:

- "Israel with its rootage in the patriarchs is viewed as the cultivated olive tree..."³¹
- "But he [Paul] returns to the theme of Israel's restoration at verse 23, pleads considerations why Israel could be grafted in again..."³²

However, there is perhaps a more precise way to describe the restoration of the unbelieving bulk of Israel.

In the section, "Israel's Restoration" in chapter 5, it is argued that the segment of Israel symbolized by the broken-off natural branches, remains part of the nation and thus in the metaphor still belongs, in a very real

29 Harrison, *Romans*, p. 121.

30 Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 576.

31 Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, II:85.

32 *Ibid.*, II:96.

sense, to the olive tree. So grafting them back into the olive tree is not "grafting Israel into Israel," because they never ceased to belong to Israel.

It is also argued in chapter 5 that covenantal blessings still, and always will, belong to Israel as the covenant nation of God. Therefore:

- In the metaphor, the breaking-off process signifies simply that these branches in that cut-off condition, while still belonging to the olive tree, do not currently receive the blessings that still flow to the olive tree from the root.
- Without the symbolism, this is what is taking place: the unbelieving bulk of the nation of Israel, while still belonging to that nation, does not currently receive the covenantal blessings that continue to flow **to the nation as the covenant nation** from the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; only the remnant within the nation receives them.

The reverse can be explained as follows.

- In the metaphor, grafting these broken-off branches back into their own olive tree enables them again to receive the blessings that flow to the olive tree from the root.
- Without the symbolism, the formerly unbelieving bulk of the nation of Israel now begins again to receive the covenantal blessings that never stopped flowing **to the nation as the covenant nation** from the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

This view does not portray "Israel grafted into Israel."

Objection 2: Branches are never said to be grafted into branches. Therefore, if the tree has no symbolic significance in and of itself, how can it be said that the Gentiles (the wild branches) are grafted into Israel (the natural branches) when they are in fact grafted into the olive tree?

The olive tree, indeed, has no independent meaning separate and distinct from its natural branches. However, if the conclusions drawn earlier in the section, "The

Olive Tree," be accepted, the cultivated olive tree can substitute for the natural branches as a symbol of national Israel, just as the wild olive tree was a substitute for the wild branches as a symbol of the Gentiles in verse 17. The action of grafting wild branches into natural branches just does not fit the imagery very well. Therefore, the wild branches are grafted into the cultivated olive tree, which does fit the imagery and means that Gentiles are grafted into Israel.

Objection 3: This interpretation of the olive tree implies that the Gentiles have been grafted into Israel. However, this notion compromises the meaning and use of the word "Israel." In the New Testament the word "Israel" always refers to ethnic, national Israel, the physical descendants of Jacob. To allow Gentiles to become part of "Israel" opens the door to replacement theology, which promotes the concept of a "new" or "spiritual Israel."

Due to my adamant opposition to replacement theology, I take this objection very seriously. Moreover, I fully agree that "Israel" in the New Testament always refers to national Israel or segment of national Israel (the "remnant"). Whatever the sense might be in which Gentiles are "grafted" into national Israel, two disclaimers must be emphasized:

- It cannot mean that the Gentiles become proselytes or Israelites. The expression "wild branches" implies that these Gentiles are not and do not become Israelites. They remain "wild." During the interadvent period they are simply "attached" to Israel in some limited sense that Paul here calls "grafting."
- Neither can it mean that Israel loses her distinct ethnic and national character as God's covenant people and covenant nation, destined to fulfill all the covenant and prophetic promises made to her. Nothing in Paul's image here even remotely suggests that national Israel will lose any of these physical and territorial promises, which will be fulfilled at the second advent.

Again, the limited sense in which Gentiles as individuals during the interadvent period are grafted into national Israel is discussed in Appendix 3.

Part II: The Commonwealth of Israel in Ephesians 2

The second passage that indicates there is a sense, however limited, in which Gentiles as individuals during the interadvent period become part of national Israel is Ephesians 2:11-22.

In this text Paul seems to make the same point regarding Gentiles in literal language that he made in Romans 11:16-24 in metaphorical language using the olive tree. Two contrasting descriptions of Gentiles relevant to this issue are given in verses 12 and 19.

12: απηλλοτριωμενοι της πολιτειας του Ισραηλ
"having been excluded from the commonwealth
of Israel"

19: εστε συμπολιται των αγιων
"you are fellow-citizens with the saints"

The Identity of "Israel" in Verse 12

Many scholars simply take "Israel" in verse 12 in the common New Testament sense of ethnic, national Israel. This is naturally true of dispensationalists,³³ but it is also true of adherents of replacement theology and amillennialism:

...they [the Gentiles] were excluded from the many blessings that pertained to the Jewish theocracy. They lacked citizenship among the chosen people. This was, indeed, a deplorable lack, for it was to Israel (for the meaning of the name see Gen. 32:28) that God of old had revealed himself in a special manner. To that people he had given his law, his special protection, his prophecies and promises. Read the following stirring passages: Deut. 32:10-14; 33:27-29; Ps. 147:20; Isa. 63:9; Ezek. 16:6-14; Amos 3:2. From all this the Ephesians had been excluded.³⁴

33 E.g., Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom*, pp. 164-65.

34 E.g., Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians*, p. 129. Also Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 127: "Ισραηλ [Israel]"

Curiously, A. T. Robertson thinks the reference is to "spiritual Israel,"³⁵ but this interpretation is completely untenable. The following points argue that "Israel" in verse 12 must refer to the nation of Israel.

- The Israel in verse 12 must be connected to the "Circumcision performed in the flesh" (v. 11), which is surely ethnic, national Israel.
- In verse 12 itself, the covenants to which the Gentiles were "strangers" belonged to ethnic, national Israel (Rom. 9:3-5).

Rather than take "Israel" in verse 12 to be "spiritual Israel," those who want to avoid the conclusion reached in the next section of this Appendix generally base their argument on verse 19.

πολιτειας and συμπολιται

The two words that link the two descriptions of Gentiles cited above from verses 12 and 19 are πολιτειας in verse 12 and συμπολιται in verse 19.

- πολιτειας: genitive singular of the first declension feminine noun, πολιτεια (*politeia*).³⁶
- συμπολιται: nominative plural of the first declension masculine noun, συμπολιτης (*sumpolitēs*); a compound word: συν (*sun*), *with, along with, together with* + πολιτης (*politēs*), *citizen*.³⁷

These are cognate words: πολιτεια means *commonwealth* or

means the theocratical people; and πολιτειας [sic] του Ισραηλ is that community or commonwealth which was Israel."

35 Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, IV:528.

36 Used only twice in the NT: Acts 22:28; Eph. 2:12.

37 Used only here in Eph. 2:19.

state,³⁸ while συμπολιτης means *fellow-citizen*.³⁹ Both involve the concept of city, nation, or state. In its only other New Testament use, πολιτεια is used for Roman "citizenship" in Acts 22:28; πολιτης is used, for example, in Acts 21:39 in the sense of "citizen" of Tarsus.

Therefore, by means of these two cognate words, verses 12 and 19 must be linked. The Gentiles were originally "excluded from citizenship in Israel" but are now "fellow-citizens." That from which the Gentiles were excluded was citizenship in the nation of Israel. Therefore, that of which they are now citizens must also be the nation of Israel. It is the most natural interpretation of these linked verses. Moreover, it solves the other problem for Gentiles noted by Paul in verse 12: the Gentiles are now no longer strangers to Israel's covenants.

To emphasize the naturalness of this connection between verses 12 and 19, note that A. T. Robertson states it without argumentation:

*Fellow-citizens (sunpolitai, old, but rare word, here only in N.T.), members now of the politeia of Israel (verse 12), the opposite of xenoi kai paroikoi [strangers and sojourners].*⁴⁰

Neither dispensationalism nor replacement theology want to say that Gentiles become citizens of national Israel. However, I see no way around the clear implication of verses 12 and 19. The whole flow of thought throughout verses 11-22 revolves around Gentiles "formerly"...but now "no longer." After having said that Gentiles

- were formerly "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel" (v. 12)

38 AG, p. 692, list the first meaning of πολιτεια as "citizenship" but suggest that the second meaning, "commonwealth" or "state," might be better for Eph. 2:12. Their suggested translation is, "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel." Indeed, "commonwealth" (or even "state") fits better, but the difference between "citizenship" and "commonwealth" does not appear to change the overall import of the text. Note also that under απαλλοτριω, *to estrange, to alienate*, p. 79, they translated the phrase, "excluded from the commonwealth of Israel."

39 AG, p. 787.

40 Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, IV:528. Note, however, that although he agrees the language of the text clearly implies that the Gentiles become citizens of "Israel," he takes "Israel" in v. 12 to mean "spiritual Israel" (IV:526).

- but are now "no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens" (v. 19),

to assert that these Gentiles are fellow citizens of some entity other than Israel does violence to the terminology and context. Gentiles as individuals become in some sense, however limited, citizens of national Israel.⁴¹

Alternatives to the View Taken Here

There are at least two interpretations that attempt to avoid this conclusion.

(1) Some scholars take verse 19 to mean that the Gentiles are now citizens "of the saints," who of course are necessarily believers. For example, Charles Hodge writes,

Formerly the Gentiles stood in the same relation to the theocracy or commonwealth of Israel, that we do to a foreign State. They had no share in its privileges, no participation in its blessings. Now they are 'fellow-citizens of the saints.' By *saints* are not to be understood the Jews, nor the ancient patriarchs, but the people of God.⁴²

It is true that τῶν ἁγίων is genitive and could be translated "of the saints." However, "πολιτης *of* the saints" would not seem to be a valid use of πολιτης. The word has a geo-political connotation. Arndt and Gingrich state that it is used "of one who lives in or comes fr. a city or country."⁴³ One is not a πολιτης (citizen) of an eclectic group of people spread throughout the world.

On the other hand, the genitive τῶν ἁγίων can also be translated "with the saints."⁴⁴ Lexicologically, this

41 Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 576, agrees with this conclusion: "Since Gentile believers 'have shared with the Jews in spiritual matters' (Ro 15:27), they are *in some sense* no longer 'excluded from citizenship in Israel' (Ep 2:12)..." (emphasis added).

42 Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 147.

43 AG, p. 693. In their entry for συμπολιτης, AG, p. 787, translate, "fellow-citizens of the saints" but immediately add, "who, as Christians, are citizens of the Kingdom of God."

44 This is the way Alford, *The Greek Testament*, III:99, translates the expression.

translation makes perfect sense. Both the Gentiles and "the saints" are together fellow-citizens of some geopolitical entity. According to verse 12, that entity is national Israel.

It is argued in the section, "The Gentiles: Citizens of National Israel" in chapter 6, that "the saints" are Jewish believers, namely, the "remnant" of Romans 11:5. They were and still are citizens of national Israel, and now believing Gentiles as individuals have joined them as fellow-citizens of that nation.

(2) Others connect συμπολιται των αγιων with the phrase that follows it: και οικειοι του θεου.

οικειοι is a masculine, nominative plural of the adjective οικειος, which is used only substantively in the New Testament.⁴⁵ It means "members of the household" in any sense.⁴⁶

Francis Beare provides an example of this approach:

The Gentiles are **no longer strangers and sojourners**--in the position neither of foreign visitors with no rights in the community (ξενοι ["strangers"]), nor of aliens enjoying temporary and limited rights as residents (παροικοι ["sojourners"])--but **fellow citizens with the saints**, no whit inferior in status to the members of the historic community of God's people. This new citizenship, however, is not conceived as a relation to **the commonwealth of Israel**, but as membership in the family of God--they are οικειοι ("kinsmen") of God.⁴⁷

A very curious train of thought is here attributed to Paul. Paul first states that becoming "fellow citizens with the saints" insures that these Gentiles are in "no whit inferior in status to the members of *the historic community of God's people*," by which Beare must mean national Israel. Yet somehow Paul's real point is not that

45 AG, p. 559. To use an adjective substantively is to use it as a noun.

46 Ibid.

47 Francis W. Beare, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols., gen. ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), 10:660 (emphasis original).

they are now fellow (in "no whit inferior") citizens of that "historic community," but rather of citizens of "the family of God." Such a train of thought must be rejected as Paul's intent.

Barry Horner, using the "near" and "far" terminology from verse 13, phrases the view this way:

[Gentiles are] "near" as "fellow citizens with the saints" comprising "God's household," v.19....The church is now "God's household" comprising Gentile Christians who are "fellow citizens with the saints [Jewish Christians]" (Eph. 2:19).⁴⁸

There are a number of problems with connecting "fellow-citizens" with "the household of God."

First, there is a similar lexicological problem to the one cited with approach (1): one does not become a πολιτης of a household; rather one becomes a πολιτης of a city or country. One becomes a "member of a household," which is the meaning of οικειος. The Gentiles are members of the household of God, but it certainly cannot be said that they are citizens of the household of God.

Second, closely related to the previous objection, the concept or image of a πολιτης (citizen) is quite distinct from that of a οικειος (member of a household). Culver rightly points out,

In Ephesians 2, after showing Jews and Gentiles since Calvary (vv. 13-18), from [*sic*; probably "form" was intended] only 'one body' he shifts the figure to citizenship; then to a household (v. 19); and finally to a whole 'building firmly framed together [which] groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord...'⁴⁹

He also writes,

In verses 19-22 Paul says the people of this new entity [the church] are *fellow citizens* with the holy beings and are of the *household* of God--two

48 Horner, *Future Israel*, p. 274 (brackets original).

49 Culver, *Systematic Theology*, p. 837 (second bracketed comment original).

very understandable human analogies.⁵⁰

One is not a citizen of a household. Verse 19 has two distinct "analogies."

Third, the syntax of the verse implies exactly what Culver stated: there are two different concepts presented by Paul.

εστε συμπολιται των αγιων και οικειοι του θεου

The literal translation is, "You are fellow-citizens with the saints **AND** members of the household of God." συμπολιται and οικειοι are both predicate nominatives of εστε, *you are*. Taking και (*and*) in its simplest sense as a copulative, citizenship and membership are here listed as two separate possessions of the Gentiles. They have become citizens of Israel and members of the household of God.⁵¹

In view of the above critique of interpretations (1) and (2), there simply is no entity present in verse 19 of which the Gentiles can be πολιται (citizens). So of what are they now citizens? The two cognate terms, πολιτεια and συμπολιτης, that link verse 19 with verse 12, provide the answer: national Israel. Unless this link is made, there is no other entity of which the Gentiles are now citizens in the entirety of verses 11-22.

Therefore, the conclusion reached above in the section, "πολιτειας and συμπολιται," remains intact: believing Gentiles are now fellow citizens with believing Jews of national Israel. Asserting that Gentiles are fellow citizens of some entity other than Israel does violence to the terminology and context.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 879 (emphasis original; bracketed comment added).

⁵¹ Note that this in no way implies that "Israel" and "household of God" are one and the same. To make an analogy, becoming both a *citizen* of the United States and a *member* of Congress does not make "United States" and "Congress" identical. This analogy is a fairly good one. One cannot be a member of Congress without being a citizen of the United States. If there is only one "people of God" during the interadvent period and it is national Israel, as argued in Appendix 1, then a similar statement can be made: one cannot be a member of the household of God without being a citizen of national Israel in some sense. This sense is fully developed, defined, and delimited in Appendix 3.

Conclusions

In Romans 11:16-24 Paul's metaphor pictures the Gentiles as individuals (not nations) having been grafted into national Israel during this interadvent period; in Ephesians 2:11-22, Paul states that Gentiles have become fellow-citizens with the remnant in national Israel. I suggest that these are two descriptions that depict the same relationship between believing Gentiles and national Israel.

These conclusions run contrary to both dispensationalism and replacement theology/amillennialism, though for different reasons, as pointed out in this appendix. However, they seem to be necessary conclusions based on a simple exegetical analysis of Romans 11 and Ephesians 2. Could it be that this apparently natural exegesis is not accepted by these two theological systems simply because the systems themselves demand that other interpretations be placed upon these passages, however unsuitable?⁵² It is

52 In the case of replacement theology/amillennialism, Israel cannot be allowed to play any future role in God's plan of redemption as an ethnic and national entity. God is "through" with national Israel, and the "church" has replaced it. Therefore, "spiritual Israel" plays an important role in the interpretation of both of these texts. Dispensationalism has two requirements: (1) national Israel must be kept distinct from the church and (2) no door must be opened to replacement theology. With breathtaking finality, Saucy, "Israel and the Church: The Case for Discontinuity," p. 253, demonstrates the imposition of this dispensational theology on the text of Eph. 2:12, 19: "The position of the Gentiles before the time of the church is described by the apostle by five statements indicating their lack of relationship to God and his promises. They were 'separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel...' (Eph 2:12)...The previous statement about being 'excluded from citizenship in Israel' and the reference to now being 'fellow citizens with God's people' (Eph 2:19) has led some to conclude that Paul is teaching that the Gentiles have been incorporated into a new spiritual Israel. The apostle, however, does not speak of the Gentiles being incorporated into Israel, or of them together forming a 'new Israel'...Nowhere in the passage does the apostle identify this new citizenship as membership in Israel..." As his alternative, Saucy goes on to cite Carl Hoch positively: "Jews and Gentiles in Christ become fellow citizens in a heavenly commonwealth that is not called Israel..." Neither is it mentioned anywhere in Ephesians 2. As I review attempts such as these to avoid the natural interpretation of Eph. 2:12, 19, I think of the words of J. C. Ryle. Although commenting on a different passage with reference to a different issue in theology, his point is quite relevant here: "I have long come to the conclusion that men may be more systematic in their statements than the Bible, and may be led into grave error by idolatrous veneration of a system" (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, III:157).

true that well-established theology, sometimes called "the analogy of faith," can be used to "inform" or shed light on obscure texts. But Romans 11 and Ephesians 2 are lengthy, systematic, and didactic passages. For such passages, the situation is reversed, and exegesis must take first place and inform theology.

Nevertheless, I share a critically important tenet with dispensationalism: the future of national Israel. Therefore, it is incumbent to explain the sense in which Gentiles in this interadvent period become in some way "part" of national Israel so as not to jeopardize in any way her integrity as a nation or her covenantal and prophetic future. The limited sense in which Gentiles are "grafted into Israel" and become "citizens of Israel" is fully developed, defined, and delimited in Appendix 3.