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The Olive Tree and the Work of God: Jacob 5 and Romans 11

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The Olive Tree and the Work of God: Jacob 5 and Romans 11

James E. Faulconer

It takes little or no imagination to see a connection between Jacob 5 and Romans 11:8–24. Both texts use the olive tree to explain God’s salvation of Israel, and in both texts the metaphor of grafting is central. In fact, these are two of a very few uses of the grafting metaphor in scripture (see also Isaiah 17:10; 1 Nephi 10:14; 15:12–18; Alma 16:17). Both of these passages use the metaphor of grafting to discuss the same theme, the restoration of Israel. As part of that discussion, both Romans and Jacob use the idea of grafting as part of a discussion of the remnant of Israel reserved to God, a discussion that answers the question of whether Israel’s apostasy means that she has been rejected. And both passages focus on the operation of grace in the work of Israel’s salvation.¹ That there is a connection between these two passages of scripture is obvious, but the nature of that connection is less obvious.

The temptation is to explain this connection by jumping too quickly to the conclusion that Paul is relying directly on Zenos’s work. The temptation to make this link is clear: Since I presume that the parable of the olive tree was recorded on the brass plates and since we know that the brass plates contain much that remained available in Israel even after Lehi and his family left for their promised land, it is theoretically possible that Paul too had access to Zenos’s

prophecy through another transcription of it extant at his time.² Furthermore, the use of the olive tree metaphor for similar purposes in Jacob, Romans, and other places, such as Jeremiah and Hosea, suggests the possibility of a text underlying these passages upon which they depend. For example, in speaking of Israel's apostasy, Jeremiah 11:16 says, "The Lord called thy name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon it, and the branches of it are broken." Israel is an olive tree that is burned because of its worship of Baal.³ In speaking of Israel, Hosea 14:6 says, "His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon."⁴ Israel is also an olive tree at its restoration. Together the Jeremiah and Hosea passages have strong parallels to both the Romans passage and that of Jacob. A common text would explain this similarity: a text such as Zenos's prophecy—written at the time of Lehi or before (most likely in the Northern kingdom of Israel) and evidenced by similar language in other prophecies—would account for Paul's use of the olive tree metaphor in ways similar to its use in Jacob.

However, in spite of the seeming possibility that these two passages are linked textually, the differences in detail between them are striking and should give us pause. If we look at the overall effect, we see similarity. If we look at the linguistic details that create that effect and in which we would expect to find similarity if both are from the same source, we find significant differences. Though the categories designated by the terms parable, allegory, metaphor, simile, and so on are not unambiguous, I think it fair to say that the first obvious difference is that Jacob 5 is a parable or allegory, while Romans 11:8–24 is not. Equally obvious is the fact that in Romans 11 there is talk of only one tree,

though an additional tree, the source of the Gentile branches, is implied. In contrast, Jacob 5 has several trees, at least five: the original cherished tree (Jacob 5:3), the original wild tree (Jacob 5:7), and at least three transplanted shoots (Jacob 5:20, 23, and 24). In addition, Zenos's parable allows one to infer that there are still more olive trees in the vineyard.

A less immediately obvious difference is that each of these passages is given in response to rather different occasions. Jacob 5 is a response to the wickedness of the people (Jacob 1:15–17). Chapter 3 of Jacob is a direct call to repentance. Chapter 4 begins abruptly with an anacoluthic⁵ reflection on writing and moves to a written response to the spoken call to repentance. The sinfulness of his people seems to make Jacob reflect on the possibility of salvation and, consequently, to draw a parallel between the Jews and the Nephites. Jacob's concern for the salvation of his people makes him think of and take comfort in the promise of salvation for the Jews. Paul, on the other hand, is correcting a potentially dangerous attitude among those otherwise known for their saintliness (see Romans 1:8). Paul uses the image of the olive tree in warning the Gentiles not to think themselves superior to the Jews, even though the Jews have not accepted Christianity.

Furthermore, in Romans 11 the branches of the trees explicitly represent different groups of people, namely the Israelites and the Gentiles. In Jacob, however, it is less clear what the branches represent. If Jacob 5 is an allegory rather than a parable, it is clearly not an allegory like *Pilgrim's Progress*, in which each character or element corresponds to one and only one thing. The branches may represent different groups of people in Jacob, just as they do in Romans. That is certainly a traditional Latter-day Saint reading of the

text, and it is a reading suggested by comparison to 1 Nephi 10:14 and 15:12–18. But the description of the fruit of the olive tree as “good and the most precious above all other fruit” (Jacob 5:61) suggests an additional parallel, a parallel between the trees in the vineyard and the tree of life.⁶ The textual backdrop of 1 Nephi 8:10–16 and 11:21–25 (the discussion of the tree of life and its fruit in Lehi’s dream) adds strength to that suggestion. But a connection between Zenos’s parable and the tree of life renders any straightforward interpretation of the parable problematic and differentiates it from the olive tree metaphor in Romans 11.

A similar problem of interpretation is raised by the fact that Jacob 6:3 suggests a parallel between Jacob’s people and the workers in the vineyard rather than between the trees or the branches of the trees and the workers, as one might expect if the parable is comparable to Paul’s metaphor. And that problem is doubled by the fact that Jacob 6:4 speaks of Israel as both the root and the branches of the olive tree.⁷

For Paul, in contrast, Israel is the branches of the olive tree, branches that can be culled and replaced by Gentile branches, but Israel is not the root of the tree. In Romans, the root of the tree is holy and, presumably, unchangeable (Romans 11:16). Whatever branch is grafted into the tree becomes holy because of the strength of the root. One suspects that when mentioning the root of the tree, Paul has in mind either the covenant made with the fathers or, perhaps, the Savior. In Jacob, on the other hand, the root is anything but holy and changeless. It is about to perish (Jacob 6:8) and needs help in order to survive (Jacob 6:11, 54). The root nourishes the branches (Jacob 6:18, 34, 36, 54, and 59) and saves itself thereby (Jacob 6:18, 54). In spite of that, it also is weak (as in Jacob 6:65) and it is overcome by the branches

(Jacob 6:37, 48). At times the root is valuable (Jacob 6:4, 36, and 60); at other times it is worthless (Jacob 6:35).

It may also be significant that Romans speaks of grafting the Gentiles into the tree, but Jacob does not. In fact, neither does Nephi, who explains that the Israelites will be grafted back in “by way of the Gentiles” (1 Nephi 15:17; cf. 15:13: “through the fulness of the Gentiles”). Though we commonly assume that the wild branches grafted into the trees in Jacob 5 are the Gentiles, there is no textual warrant in Jacob 5 for doing so. The presumed similarity of the parable to Romans 11 may be part of the reason for that reading. However, if we follow the reading suggested by Jacob 6 and such passages as 1 Nephi 10:12–14 and 15:13–16, perhaps we will read the workers in Zenos’s parable, rather than the grafted branches, as representing the Gentiles. In contrast, Paul is explicit about the grafting in of the Gentiles.

In Paul’s letter, the permanent grafting in of the Gentiles is a means of saving the Jew by provoking him to jealousy, and it is, at least potentially, also the possibility of salvation for the Gentile. In Zenos’s prophecy, however, the grafting is not so clearly a means of saving any particular group. It is the means the Lord chooses for providing himself with fruit from the trees. Though at the beginning of Zenos’s parable, the tree itself appears to be important (for example, see Jacob 5:4, 7), it is apparent at the end that the trees and branches themselves, especially the wild branches, were incidental to the Lord’s purpose. In Jacob 5:57 the wild branches that produce bitter fruit are plucked out, and in Jacob 5:77 they all are burned.⁸ As the end of the parable makes apparent, the fruit, not the trees or their branches is important in Zenos’s parable:

And thus they labored . . . until the bad had been cast away out of the vineyard, and the Lord had preserved

unto himself that the trees had become again the natural fruit; . . . and the Lord of the vineyard had preserved unto himself the natural fruit, which was most precious unto him from the beginning. And it came to pass that . . . he called up his servants, and said unto them: . . . I have preserved the natural fruit, that it is good, even like as it was in the beginning. And blessed art thou; . . . because ye . . . have brought unto me again the natural fruit. . . . For behold, for a long time will I lay up of the fruit of my vineyard unto mine own self against the season, which speedily cometh; . . . I will lay up unto mine own self of the fruit, for a long time, according to that which I have spoken. And when the time cometh that evil fruit shall again come into my vineyard, then . . . cometh the season and the end; and my vineyard will I cause to be burned with fire.

(Jacob 5:74–77.)

Note that just as the possibility of good fruit is what keeps the Lord from destroying the vineyard, the presence of evil fruit brings the vineyard's burning. The point of Zenos's story is the gathering of fruit, not the preservation of either branches or root. In contrast, for Paul it is the tree and particularly its branches that matter, not the fruit, of which there is no mention in Romans 11.

Paul uses the olive tree to show how Israel will be preserved through an act of grace. The Lord will use Israel's jealousy of the Gentiles to entice Israel to return. Though Zenos too shows how Israel will be preserved through grace, he uses the olive tree in a very different way than does Paul. Zenos's parable demonstrates the lengths to which the Lord of the vineyard will go to preserve his fruit. As Jacob 5:60 makes clear, Zenos allegorizes the olive tree to show how the Lord can preserve his fruit (which remains undefined in the parable), but as verses 74 through 77 show, the tree itself is expendable. However, it is not at all clear

that the preserved fruit is to be identified with Israel. Consequently, for Jacob the parable shows the blessings that come to those who continue to work in the vineyard (Jacob 6:3). Where Paul uses the olive tree to bring the Gentiles to humility, Jacob sees in it the message that Israel, including his audience, must be faithful.

These and many other differences in detail between Jacob 5 and Romans 11 show that in spite of our temptation otherwise we may not make a very strong case for a common text connecting Jacob and Romans by pointing to their similarities.⁹ Those similarities indicate no more than a possibility, a possibility that seems less likely given that there seems, at first glance, to be no other evidence that Paul could have had Zenos's parable available to him. In fact, the absence of any strong evidence of Zenos's parable in any other New Testament or early Christian texts counts as evidence against the supposition.

Given the evidence to this point, it would seem more likely that, rather than a common text, Paul and Zenos shared a common rhetorical tradition, one in which the olive tree stands for Israel, and its destruction and restoration are associated loosely with Israel's apostasy and restoration.¹⁰ Passages in Psalm 80, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others provide a strong common background that Paul undoubtedly drew upon in writing to the Roman saints, a tradition that Paul assumed his audience already understood.¹¹ Though Paul utilized this Israelite tradition, he also reshaped it to suit his particular religious insights and pastoral needs.

In spite of the differences between Romans 11 and Jacob 5, however, other linguistic evidence suggests the possibility of a stronger connection between the Romans and Jacob passages. First, Zenos frequently uses the phrase "preserve

. . . unto myself" and the related phrase, "lay up . . . unto myself."¹² We see similar language in Romans 11. There Paul takes up the question of how the Jews can continue to be the people of God even though they are presently disobedient to and gainsaying of God (Romans 10:21). Allegorizing history, Paul quotes from 1 Kings 19 to demonstrate the manner in which the Father preserved a remnant in the past: "But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:4–5). Israel is not cast off, because the Father has reserved unto himself a remnant. Translation differences might account for the use of "reserved" in one case and "preserved" in another, but the possibility is strong that we are looking at the same underlying word or specific concept (rather than general theme) here.

Those who prefer to see this as a common rhetorical tradition might respond by pointing out that Paul moves from the discussion of those reserved to the discussion of the olive tree. These seem to be two different topics, so we cannot use the similarity of the wording in Romans 11:4 and 5 to that in Jacob 5 to justify a connection between the two references to olive trees. But in the discussion of the olive tree, Paul's theme remains those reserved (*kataleípō*: "left behind," "remaining"). He compares Israel to an olive tree and the Gentiles to branches that are grafted in in an attempt to preserve a remnant. The discussion of the olive tree is a digression from the answer Paul gives to the question with which he begins the chapter ("Has God rejected his people?"). It is a digression that could have been suggested either by the parallel between the language of 1 Kings 19 and Zenos's parable, or—if the parable itself was

not available to Paul—by a traditional rhetorical connection between the theme of reserving or preserving a remnant and the use of the olive tree metaphor. However, though the discussion in verses 8 through 24 is a digression from the answer to the original question, it is a digression within the theme of a remnant rather than away from it. The digression illustrates the preservation of the remnant. Though obviously only a conjecture, the availability of Zenos's parable to Paul would explain the juxtaposition of the specific idea of preservation of a remnant with the use of the olive tree metaphor. In any case, something more than general rhetorical tradition seems to be at work here.

The claim that something more than tradition is at work here is strengthened by additional parallels of detail between Romans 11 and Jacob's sermon (Jacob 4–6). There are several of these, including the reference to the stumbling block (cf. Romans 11:9 and Jacob 4:14) and the recognition of the mystery of God's ways and the advice not to counsel God (Romans 11:20b and 33–34, and Jacob 4:8–10).¹³ Though we have seen that there are significant differences in the context in which Jacob and Paul introduce their references to the olive tree, it is also true that they both do so in response to the same problem, namely, the apostasy of Israel. In Jacob 4:14, Jacob says that Israel "killed the prophets. . . . Wherefore, because of their blindness, . . . they must needs fall; . . . and because they desired it God hath done it, that they may stumble." The same accusations and claims introduce the metaphor of the olive tree in Romans 11, and in virtually the same order, although more widely separated: Paul specifically mentions killing the prophets (Romans 11:3), the blindness of Israel (Romans 11:7, 8, and 10), and their stumbling (Romans 11:9, 11), and he refers to the consequence as their fall (Romans 11:11). Paul attributes

the agency of these events to God (Romans 11:8: "God hath given them the spirit of slumber"), just as does Jacob in 4:14 ("God hath done it," that is, "delivered many things unto them that they cannot understand").¹⁴

This parallel between the Pauline and Book of Mormon texts is more difficult to explain by a common rhetorical tradition alone. It is true that the conceptual connection between blindness and stumbling is obvious. We see it in such places as Leviticus 19:14, Proverbs 4:19, Isaiah 59:10, and Jeremiah 13:16. Stumbling and falling are often connected (see Jeremiah 46:6; 50:32; Daniel 11:19), even together with murderous enemies (Psalm 27:2; Proverbs 24:17). That two writers would use blindness as a metaphor for sin and a stumbling consequent on blindness as a metaphor for apostasy or falling is perhaps not surprising or indicative of much connection. In addition, Isaiah, for whom we know Nephi and Jacob had profound respect and who was obviously also available to Paul, frequently mentions the blindness and stumbling of Israel (see Isaiah 8:14–15 and 59:10). Perhaps one could explain the appearance of olive tree imagery in Romans and Jacob by the fact that both Jacob and Paul share the book of Isaiah and similar Old Testament texts as background. However, nowhere but in these two texts, Jacob and Romans, do we find this close conjunction of these themes: killing the prophets, blindness, stumbling, and apostasy, as well as an element in these events as the act of God. And, in both cases, the conjunction of these themes is followed by the use of the olive tree metaphor.¹⁵ These factors mitigate the earlier evidence that points away from a common textual connection between Jacob 5 and Romans 11; they point to the possibility of the text of Zenos's parable or a variation of that text, such as perhaps the work of Kenas, as a direct connection between

Romans 11 and Jacob 5. Indeed, the warnings to Israel in the Kenas text state that Israel has “destroyed its own fruit” and “sinned against” God, and ask “will the shepherd destroy his flock?”¹⁶ Like Romans 11:1—which begins with the question “Hath God cast away his people?”—Kenas also answers that God will spare Israel “according to the abundance of his mercy.”¹⁷ Thus, the best explanation is, I believe, that a third text or texts stood between Zenos and Paul. That text could have been a paraphrase or synopsis of Zenos’s work, or perhaps a text on which Zenos’s parable itself depended.

To believe that Zenos’s text—or some version of it—is common to both Paul and Jacob, we must assume that Jacob begins relying on Zenos in Jacob 4, about verse 8, and that Paul has picked up the same themes from the source he shares with Jacob, (1) whether that source is the actual text of Zenos’s prophecy, (2) a third text with the same, perhaps inherited, features, or (3) whether the source is only a rhetorical convention that Paul has inherited from the seventh century B.C. or before. Of these three alternatives, the latter is the least satisfactory because we do not see the conjunction of these details in any other place, leaving too much to coincidence. The first seems to be unsupported by other evidence, such as evidence from other early Christian texts. Thus, in spite of the difficulties with assuming that Paul had access to Zenos’s parable, I think the best explanation of the coincidence of Romans 11:3–11 and Jacob 4:8–18, and of the fact that in each the image of the olive tree is used immediately afterward to illustrate God’s power to save Israel, is that Paul had available a text with the same features that it shares with Zenos’s text. Perhaps that text was a précis of Zenos’s parable or a quotation of it. Perhaps it was an earlier text on which Zenos too relied. Though not

conclusive, there is reasonable evidence for more than a coincidental relationship between the texts of Romans 11 and Jacob 5; Paul's use of the olive tree and Zeno's parable may well be related not just by rhetorical tradition, but by an actual text.¹⁸

Whatever the textual case, whether Jacob and Paul had access to the same text directly, whether (more likely) they had that access through some textual intermediary—such as a quotation in a third text—or whether, least likely, they only share a rhetorical tradition, these passages are also the same at what Augustine called the anagogical level, the level of spiritual significance. Jacob and Paul share, if you will, the anagogical text, as well as any other manuscript text they might have in common. Though that anagogical identity may not establish anything with regard to the question of the textual connection between Romans 11 and Jacob 5, it does show an interdependence of these texts at another level.

The central point of Romans 11 is to be found in verse 5, which I translate: "Even so, at this time, there is a remnant chosen by grace." As Paul makes clear over and over again in Romans, righteousness is a condition of salvation; but he emphasizes here, as he does elsewhere, that the grace of God, not the righteousness of those saved, brings salvation, and that grace is particularly demonstrated in the divine ability to turn the fall of Israel into the salvation of the Gentiles and the grafting or adoption of the Gentiles into the house of Israel. Paul testifies of the Father's power to turn the vagaries of history and sin into blessings for those concerned: the covenant made with the fathers will be fulfilled. That fact serves as both a promise and a blessing to Paul's listeners. The Jews in Paul's audience are reminded that they have a birthright to claim, the birthright given by covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Romans 11:1 and 2).

At the same time, Gentile listeners are promised that they too can have the blessings of that covenant (Romans 11:13, 17, 22, 25, and 30-32). On the other hand, the Jews are reminded that the promise is not made to them individually, but collectively, so they cannot boast in their inheritance (Romans 11:4-5, 7-10), and the Gentiles are reminded that they too must fear (Romans 11:20), for though they have been invited to participate in the inheritance, they may, at any moment, be cut off (Romans 11:22).

Jacob 5 makes a similar point. At the heart of Zenos's parable we find that no tree in the vineyard is worthy to be saved:

And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant: Let us go to and hew down the trees of the vineyard and cast them into the fire, that they shall not cumber the ground of my vineyard, for I have done all. What could I have done more for my vineyard? But, behold, the servant said unto the Lord of the vineyard: Spare it a little longer. And the Lord said: Yea, I will spare it a little longer, for it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard.

(Jacob 5:49-51; see also verses 26 and 42.)

The unworthiness of the trees in the vineyard brings home to us what has been apparent from the beginning: The Lord of the vineyard works to save the trees, but not for what they presently are.¹⁹ After all, the parable begins with the best tree already being old and decayed (Jacob 5:3), and it shows how that tree and the other resulting trees are often weak and usually produce bad fruit. The Lord saves the trees because he desires their fruit. He labors to save the trees because doing so serves his purposes, namely the production of fruit that he reserves for himself, and he commands his servants to join in that labor. He does not save

the trees because they have some intrinsic value in themselves. The remnant, what is reserved, is chosen by the Lord's grace and power in spite of its unworthiness and decay—not on account of the merit of the trees. Even though labor is demanded, it is not to be confused with merit. In fact, the unworthiness of the trees is what calls forth the need for the righteous work of the Lord and his servants. A clause from Jacob 6:2 serves as a good synopsis of the point Jacob and Paul are making that the salvation of Israel is the Lord's gracious work: "The Lord shall go forth in his power, to nourish and prune his vineyard." He will do what is necessary to fulfill his covenant to Israel.

As in Romans, in Jacob the image of the olive tree serves as both a promise and a warning. Jacob 2:2–3:12 makes it apparent that the Nephites are burdened with sin. In Jacob 4, in an aside to his readers, Jacob follows his sermon on sin with his testimony of Christ, and he points out that, his testimony notwithstanding, there are those who will reject his words, and he offers the Israelites as an example. Chapter 5 follows as a promise to those who will labor in the vineyard, as Jacob 6:3 makes clear. But every divine promise is also a warning, as Jacob 6:3 also shows: "And how blessed are they who have labored diligently in his vineyard; and how cursed are they who shall be cast out into their own place!"

In sum, according to both Zenos and Paul, salvation comes by graceful power, a graceful power that requires our labor with and for our Lord as its consequence. Salvation is promised to those to whom God has covenanted. As Paul has said, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38–39).



An olive branch in blossom. Paul uses the olive tree to show how Israel will be preserved through an act of God's grace. Few factors in Paul's allegory are present in Jacob 5, and many elements in both accounts are absent in the other, making it difficult to ascertain how the two might be historically related. Perhaps Paul and Zenos had indirect access to a common ancient Israelite textual source.

It is not, however, as easy as one might think to decide just who will be saved or who has been cut off. Salvation is not something we can predict or explain; it often goes against our rational expectations, and it sometimes undoes what seems perfectly apparent to us. Until the harvest, the ripe good fruit cannot be separated from the bitter. Salvation is not something we can earn, but as part of our work as servants in the vineyard, we are nonetheless required to keep the commandments of God if we are to receive his salvation. As Jacob points out, those who labor in the vineyard will be blessed, and we are promised that if we perform the divine labor required of us, we participate in the salvation that God has offered to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by covenant.

In both Romans and Jacob, and in spite of other differ-

ences, the olive tree reminds us of the mystery that several Old Testament prophets emphasize: the Lord takes responsibility for both the thriving and the death of his covenant people. Jacob says: "And now, my beloved, how is it possible that these, after having rejected the sure foundation, can ever build upon it, that it may become the head of their corner? Behold, my beloved brethren, I will unfold this mystery unto you" (Jacob 4:17–18). The mystery he then unfolds is the parable of the olive trees, in which it becomes clear that the answer is "because the Lord desires it" (see particularly Jacob 5:49 and 50). Paul takes up the same question, "How can Israel be saved, having rejected the Savior who was offered" (cf. Romans 10:21 and 11:1). And Paul gives the same answer as did Jacob: Israel will be saved by the mystery of God's love and desire for his people, a mystery that the figure of the olive tree helps us understand. Both writers reveal a mystery, something hidden from the world and from natural understanding, and both warn us that it is a mystery. Though we look forward to thriving through repentance and the covenants of God and though we can watch that come about, as illustrated with the olive tree, it is not our place to presume to explain why some thrive and others die. We must trust in the covenant the Lord has made to his people, even when we see no hope of that covenant being fulfilled. The botanical anomaly of the parable that wild branches might bear good fruit might well convey a very important message: with God all things are possible.

It is a human temptation to despair in the face of what seem overwhelming odds, in this case, when faced with the sinfulness of the covenant people. Human despair is often exacerbated by our demand for a clear and rational explanation of how such odds are to be overcome and of our failure

to find any answer to that demand. But Jacob reminds his readers of the power of God (Jacob 4:9) and warns them, "Wherefore, brethren, seek not to counsel the Lord" (Jacob 4:10). And, after giving the parable, he says, "O be wise; what can I say more?" (Jacob 6:12). Paul offers a similar warning: Having explained the power of God (Romans 11:11–15) and having illustrated that power by means of the figure of the olive tree (Romans 11:16–19), Paul like so many prophets warns his audience, "Be not highminded, but fear: . . . O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" (Romans 11:20, 33–34). We must trust in the Lord rather than in our own devices.

Paul shares with Zenos and all the prophets of Israel the divine message that salvation comes by God's grace and power, the message that the Lord can and will keep his covenants with his chosen people. Though the process by which salvation comes may be beyond our ken, as the figure of the olive tree shows, Israel can trust the Lord because he has the power to save his people, in spite of what might appear to us to be impossible odds. Our choice is to despair or to trust the Lord, and the scriptures enjoin us to trust and, so, to hope.

Notes

1. See not only the references in Romans 11, such as verses 5 and 6, but also verses 49 through 51 of Jacob 5, where it is clear that the forbearance of the Lord and the consequent salvation is a matter of grace, not merit. The last part of this essay will take up that issue.

2. It may be more accurate to call Jacob 5 a parable rather than an allegory, but the terminology is sufficiently loose that it isn't important to insist on one term or the other.

3. This use of the olive tree in the context of a reference to Baal worship suggests a connection to verses 3 and 4 of Romans 11 where Paul answers the question, "Has God cast off his people?" by

reminding his listeners of the seven thousand who did not bow the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:10–18).

4. Jeremiah was known to the Nephites (see 1 Nephi 5:13; 7:14; Helaman 8:20). Given Hosea's dates (before 736 B.C.) and the fact that he, like Lehi's family, was a northerner, Hosea's prophecies may also have been available to the Nephites, though I know of no textual evidence for such a claim.

5. Anacoluthon is a rhetorical figure: ending a sentence or clause with a grammatical construction that is different than that with which it began.

6. Bruce W. Jorgenson has written an extensive and provocative unpublished essay on the tree of life, including a discussion of Zenos's parable and the seed that grows into a tree in Alma 32.

7. This complicates any simple interpretation of the parable because it seems to contradict Jacob's identification of the servants and the people he addresses and because it makes difficult any understanding of the burning of the trees.

8. Given the agricultural practice of burning the olive orchard as a means of rejuvenating it, the burning may also suggest renewal. The scriptural ideas of final destruction and renewal are not necessarily incompatible.

9. This also means, of course, that detractors of the Book of Mormon have less textual warrant than they assume if they suppose that Jacob 5 is simply a creative expansion of what Joseph Smith found in Romans 11. A long list of elements has been generated by John W. Welch showing that relatively few of the factors in Romans 11 are present among the main points of the allegory in Jacob 5, and vice versa. For example, in Romans but not in Zenos we find the following phrases or ideas: the casting away of the Jews is the reconciling of the world (11:15); receiving the Jews is life from the dead (11:15); if the first bread is holy, so is the loaf (11:16); if the root is holy, so are the branches (11:16); identifying the Gentiles as a wild tree (11:17); the Gentiles should not be highminded, but fear (11:20); beholding the goodness and severity of God (11:22); all Israel shall be saved (11:26); the Jews are now enemies of the Gentiles (11:28); the Jews are still beloved for their fathers' sake (11:28); the call of God is a gift (11:29); the Gentiles have received mercy through the unbelief of the Jews (11:30); the Jews will receive mercy through the Gentiles' mercy (11:31); and God sees all in unbelief that he may have mercy on all (11:32). Similarly, the following precise or basic elements are important throughout the text of Zenos, but absent in Romans 11: "tame olive tree"; nourishing; "waxed old"; "decay"; pruning; dig-

ging about; shooting forth young and tender branches; "main top"; planting or grafting young shoots whithersoever one wants; working to preserve the roots; nethermost part(s) of the vineyard; poor spot of ground; preserving the natural branches; laying up fruit, desiring good fruit; long passages of time; behavior of fruit on a graft; one tree bringing forth both good fruit and bad fruit at the same time; the top "overruns the roots"; "good for nothing"; "loftiness of the vineyard"; branches grow faster than the strength of the roots; wild fruit is "bitter"; "mother tree"; "trim up the branches that are ripened"; a change in the nature of the branches affects the root; if one clears the bad out too quickly, the root will be too strong and will kill the graft; keeping the root and the top equal; burning the bad wood; master of the vineyard; and servant(s).

10. For further discussions of this tradition, see the articles by David Seely, John Welch, and John Tvedtnes in this volume.

11. Paul speaks as if his audience already knows that they have been grafted in; he gives little detail about the natural tree or the wild branches, and he abruptly begins by assuming a given conditional, "If some of the branches were broken off. . . ." Such points have led New Testament scholars to comment that Paul's allegory limps for lack of sufficient detail, or to see it as oddly imported into the discussion, "a motif alien to Paul's purpose," W. D. Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 159; others speculate about the sources that Paul was taking for granted, suggesting passages in the Old Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, and others; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 308; Anthony Tyrell Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 120–21; H. J. Schoeps, *Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 242 n. 5. All this gives the impression that Paul presumed that his audience knew in general the metaphor that he was invoking.

12. The phrase, "preserve . . . unto myself," is found in Jacob 5:8, 11, 13, 46, 53, 54, 75, and 77. "Lay up . . . unto myself" is found in Jacob 5:13, 18, 19, 29, 71, and 76.

13. Consider, however, that the advice not to counsel the Lord is followed in Zenos's text by a story in which the servant does counsel the Lord, both unsuccessfully (Jacob 5:21–22) and successfully (Jacob 5:48–51). At least part of the parable of the olive tree seems to be a message about how the servants of God can counsel with him.

14. This is the key point of both the Romans and the Jacob passage. See a similar theme in Exodus 8:19; Deuteronomy 2:30; 2 Chronicles 30:7; Psalm 80:12; and perhaps Mormon 5:16.

15. Note that the first edition of the Book of Mormon follows the manuscript in not making a chapter split between Jacob 4 and 5. This suggests that Jacob 4:14 is more closely connected to the parable that follows than contemporary chapter and verse division would indicate.

16. *Pseudo-Philo* 28:45, in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 2:341.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Given the evidence on both sides, detractors of the Book of Mormon will have difficulty explaining the points of connection between Romans and Jacob as merely Joseph Smith's creative use of Romans, just as no definite conclusion can be reached about the textual connection between Zenos and Paul either.

19. Regarding the unworthiness of the trees, note the decay of the olive tree (Jacob 5:3) and the fact that the Lord comes to work the vineyard with the servant. These two things may imply the failure of the previous laborers to care properly for the tree. If so, then we see in the parable—and in Jacob's call to his listeners to be servants and to work faithfully in the vineyard (Jacob 6:2–3)—a call to join in the work by which the Lord's saving grace comes to pass, the work of preserving a remnant. After all, *labor* is one of the most common and important words of this parable.