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Translation, Exegesis, and 1 Thessalonians 2.14–15: Could a Comma Have Changed the Course of History?

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Abstract
This article examines recent commentaries and translations of 1 Thessalonians 2:14–15, especially the issue of whether the clause describing the Jews is restrictive or not. The author argues that some recent scholarship shows that the clause should be taken as restrictive, but that a number of recent commentaries and translations—although with some encouraging exceptions—have failed to take this into account. This interpretation, which entails punctuation without a comma at the end of v. 14 (in English and Greek), clarifies a number of exegetical problems.

Keywords
1 Thessalonians 2.14–15, anti-Semitism, Frank Gilliard, restrictive clause, translation, commentary

Introduction

I am pleased to offer this contribution in honor of my friend Dr Roger Omanson. Others know Roger far better than I do, but I had the privilege of working with Roger as a member of the editorial board for *The Bible Translator* for a number of years, and through that experience came to appreciate his dedication to responsible interpretation of the Bible. I am sure that many authors who have had their work published in *The Bible Translator* have recognized that Roger is not a passive editor, but one who has on many occasions and in differing ways encouraged and enhanced the work of

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individual contributors. Even more important, Roger has combined in his life of service to the church, and especially to the cause of Bible translation, important dimensions that are often neglected. He himself is a translator, an exegete, an interpreter, and one who has applied the Bible to his own life. I fear that in too few cases are all of these dimensions brought together as they should be in a single life of Christian service. The issue that I wish to address in this paper focuses on one crucial place in the New Testament—1 Thess 2.14–15—where all of these issues should, indeed must, come together, in ways that they usually have not, and I fear that the consequences of not having done so may well have been greater than we could have imagined.

The Problem of 1 Thessalonians 2.14–15

My interest in 1 Thess 2.14–15 was first excited in a major way when I was preaching through passages in 1 Thessalonians in chapel services at McMaster Divinity College. I came to 1 Thess 2.13–16 and was struck by the apparently comprehensive condemnation of the Jews that comes across in vv. 14–15 in most translations, as well as the Greek text in the standard editions. The major problem of 1 Thess 2.14–15 is that this passage—at least according to the Greek text as it is punctuated, virtually all English (and many other) translations, the vast majority of exegetes, and most historians of early Christianity—is part of the longest and strongest anti-Semitic statement by Paul in the New Testament. Even if we recognize that Jesus himself criticizes the Jewish establishment for killing its prophets (Matt 23.29) or that Paul himself, as a Jew, criticizes his fellow Jews (e.g., 2 Cor 11.24), this passage stands out. In this passage, Paul is depicted as condemning "the Jews" as the ones who killed Jesus (the only time he purportedly says this) and the prophets, persecuted him and his co-workers, were unpleasing to God, and hindered him in his mission. As a result, this passage has had an important effect upon interpretation of the New Testament. At least in part because of this passage,[1] F. C. Baur was prompted to develop his revisionist history of early Christianity; Paul has been characterized by some to this day as himself anti-Semitic; some have posited that this uncharacteristic passage should be excised because it is a later anti-Semitic interpolation; Christians as a whole have too many times (sometimes justly, perhaps because of this passage) been characterized as anti-Semitic; and some have probably even used it as a biblical justification for anti-Semitic beliefs and actions. The issue boils down to a simple comma. While preparing my sermon, my

[1] I realize that it is difficult to establish direct cause and effect in such circumstances, but I think that it is reasonable to link this passage with the consequences noted.

investigation of the passage in light of both Greek syntax and Paul's other statements regarding the Jews led me to delete the comma in both my Greek edition and my English translation (and to draw attention to such in my sermon)[2] with determination to return to the passage to investigate further. This article is the result of some of that further investigation, especially of vv. 14–15.[3] I wish to argue here that the standard interpretation is wrong, unnecessary, and could have been avoided if closer attention had been paid to both the Greek and English texts of 1 Thess 2.14–15.

Previous Interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 2.14–15

This article is not the place to review the history of interpretation of 1 Thess 2.14–15. The traditional view of this passage, reflected in numerous works on it, is that Paul, if he is the author, uttered a highly polemical and vitriolic statement condemning the Jews for their role in the death of Jesus and other negative events.[4] In a very important article on this verse, the historian Frank Gilliard has provided a more than adequate account of the history of its interpretation, including its treatment by ancient interpreters, various Bible translations, and modern exegetes from Baur to the present (Gilliard 1989).[5] I can only summarize this history here, before I examine what has been learned from Gilliard more recently regarding this passage.

The standard interpretation assumes that there is to be in the English (and apparently most other) translations a comma after "the Jews" in 1 Thess 2.14, so that it reads, "you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all men" (RSV). The English comma makes the clause non-restrictive, that is, it does not restrict "the Jews" involved in the events enumerated.[6] As mentioned above,

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[2] I do not agree that the preacher should refrain from shaking confidence in English translations. If the translations are wrong, they should be corrected.

[3] Since then, I also came across a blog post by Craig Blomberg on this verse (June 30, 2011), who in his blog and the responses provided some helpful information on some of the translations I discuss below (see www.denverseminary.edu/craig-blombergs-blog-new-testament-musings/can-commas-be-that-important).

[4] Scholarship on this passage up to 1998 is found in Weima and Porter 1998, 161–73.

[5] I am dependent upon Gilliard's article in the summary that follows, and use his article as what should have been a turning point in interpretation of 1 Thess 2.14–15. See now also Amphoux (2003), who finds a similar situation in the French interpretive tradition, which he attributes to intrusion from the Latin texts.

[6] Once one realizes that the clause is restrictive, the use of "the Jews" in this context makes sense. Otherwise, it seems preternaturally bold, and those sensitive to the issue are tempted to find any number of other ways to account for the usage (e.g., realizing that Paul knew there were Jewish Christians in Judea).

virtually all English translations before Gilliard's study have the comma or similar punctuation. A similar case is found in German, because German apparently uses the comma whether the clause is restrictive or not. The commentary tradition is also similar, authors indicating by their statements that they believe that all Jews (in other words non-restrictive usage) are meant by the text. Gilliard speculates (and I think that his speculation is probably accurate) that it was Baur and his followers who established the modern tradition of interpretation, which has been followed in virtually all commentaries in English on 1 Thessalonians at least to the time of Gilliard (1989, 484; I will investigate below what has happened since). The result of this interpretation has been, as mentioned above, that some interpreters, rightly wishing to distance Paul from such implications, have argued that the passage is a later interpolation. This position is also in keeping with the historical reconstruction of early Christianity offered by some interpreters, who wish to see strong anti-Semitism emerging in the late first century/early second century and growing in strength from that time forward.

The presence of the comma in both English and German is not a necessary interpretation of the Greek text, nor is the comma necessary in Greek. First of all, as is commonly known, punctuation was variable and not fixed in early Greek manuscripts, with relatively fixed punctuation not occurring until well after development of the codex. Second, there are no manuscripts of this portion of 1 Thessalonians that predate the major codexes. My own examination of the photographic reproductions and facsimiles of both Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus clearly shows that there is no punctuation after the word "Jews" in either one. More important to consider is the way that modifying clauses are understood and punctuated in Greek. Gilliard observes that the Greek grammars are not particularly helpful at this point. He notes that A. T. Robertson and BDF offer no helpful distinctions for this instance (1989, 488). Dana and Mantey, however, do indicate that the Greek articular modifying participle may be used either restrictively or non-restrictively.[7] They offer John 6.50 as an example of restrictive use ("the bread that comes down from heaven"), with the articular participle following the articular noun.

Gilliard, however, offers a more extensive analysis of both restrictive and non-restrictive uses of the articular participle. The first category he examines consists of examples where the context makes clear that the usage is restrictive. Instances include 1 Cor 1.2 and 2 Cor 1.1: "the church of God that is in Corinth." The second category he examines comprises one-of-a-kind entities, that is, those that cannot be restricted because they are the only instance. This

[7] Gilliard (1989, 488), citing H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1927; repr. 1946), 224–25.

use is usually reserved for proper nouns or even God or Jesus Christ. In these instances, which are non-restrictive, Gilliard nevertheless justifies the translation without a comma (as if restrictive) on the basis of the articular use of the participle (1989, 490).[8] The third category includes instances of nouns that are not one of a kind, into which "the Jews" fits. Gilliard finds that thirty-two of thirty-five instances of this kind in the undisputed Pauline letters translated in the RSV by relative clauses are taken as restrictive on the basis of not using the comma (1989, 490 and n. 6). The three instances with commas include 1 Cor 2.6 ("the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away") and 2 Cor 1.6 ("for your comfort, which you experience"), along with 1 Thess 2.14–15 (Gilliard 1989, 490–93). Gilliard is right to question the first two of these. Paul may have believed that there were "rulers of this age" who would not pass away before the parousia (in other words, this may be restrictive and should not have a comma), and the comfort is limited to that which "you experience when you patiently endure" (in other words, this probably is restrictive and should not have a comma).

That leaves only 1 Thess 2.14–15 as non-restrictive, that is, with the comma, according to standard renderings. Gilliard points out several difficulties with this position, besides the obvious one that it is the only example of the thirty-five (apart from the two questionable examples he has dealt with) that is non-restrictive using a Greek articular participle modifying a noun and translated by a relative clause in the RSV. One additional difficulty (and an important one in the history of interpretation) is that this passage is then made to be at odds with Rom 11.2–5, where Paul indicates that it is not all of the Jews who killed the prophets (Gilliard 1989, 499–500).[9] A second is that Paul had other syntactical options had he wished to indicate clearly the non-restrictive possibility. One would have been a Greek relative clause ("the Jews, who . . . "), although the relative clause in Greek may be either restrictive or non-restrictive.[10] Another would have been the anarthrous use of the participle.[11] A third difficulty is that there is an unnecessary

[8] Gilliard (1989, 489) seems to have confused the issue of whether the structure is restrictive or non-restrictive simply on the basis of the articular use of the participle, rather than on the basis of the nature of the entities involved and whether they are contextually restrictive or not. This merits further research.

[9] There are other passages to consider, some of which Gilliard mentions and others that are mentioned by other commentators (see below).

[10] Gilliard 1989, 492. I do not find all of Gilliard's examples convincing at this point. Nevertheless, the result is that relative clauses may be used either restrictively or non-restrictively.

[11] I am not entirely convinced that Gilliard has grasped the use of the anarthrous participle, and his citation of C. F. D. Moule at this point only adds to the confusion (1989, 493 n. 1, citing Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* [2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959], 106–7).

shift in understanding from the restrictive interpretation of a similar construction in 1 Thess 2.14a ("the churches of God that are in Judea") to the non-restrictive use in v. 14b with "the Jews" (Gilliard 1989, 489).

Gilliard not only concludes that this passage should be rendered restrictively so as to limit the Jews involved in the killing of Jesus and the further events related, but believes that these groups can be, at least to some extent, more specifically identified (1989, 498–501). I think that Gilliard goes too far in his speculation, identifying the four groups primarily on the basis of dividing them into two past and two present groups according to the tense-forms of the participles.[12] Nevertheless, he has made a clear case for the restrictive nature of the use of the participles in 1 Thess 2.14–15, and for not using the English comma in translation (or in the Greek text).[13]

Subsequent Commentary and Translation

If Gilliard has made a strong case for the restrictive use of the participle and the elimination of the English (and Greek) comma in 1 Thess 2.14–15, what should we expect as a result? If Gilliard is wrong, I would expect a clear refutation of his case in a significant journal article, in a chapter in a book, or at least in subsequent commentaries on 1 Thess 2.14–15. There may be such a refutation, but I do not know of it. There are some who have accepted that the sense of "the Jews" is restricted,[14] and one who has misunderstood the function of the Greek article (Verhoef 1995, 41–46),[15] but there are no refutations of Gilliard that I am aware of. I would also expect at least passing reference to an article of such significance in subsequent work.

In light of this, I believe that it is worth examining a number of commentaries on 1 Thessalonians that have been written since Gilliard's article, to see how they take his trenchant comments into account. Then I will examine a number of translations published since then to see how they have been influenced by his work.

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[12] Gilliard fails to note that the tense-forms in Greek are aspectual and not temporal, and therefore cannot be used to make such time-based distinctions. This feature of participles has in fact been recognized by Greek grammarians for over one hundred years, including some of those he cites. In particular, see Porter 1989, 365–401, esp. 378.

[13] Gilliard wrote a later article (1994) specifically on the killing of the prophets in 1 Thess 2.15, where he argues that it is Christian prophets Paul refers to. He also repeats his claim that Paul is not referring to all Jews but is restricting himself to those who killed Jesus and the Christian prophets.

[14] For example, Weatherley 1991; 1994, 176–94.

[15] Verhoef takes the article as amplifying, and hence as attributive. The group with the participle is attributive, but that does not mean it is amplificatory. Verhoef acknowledges that Paul knew that not all Jews were guilty, but claims that he accused all of them because he was carried away by emotion.

a. Commentaries on 1 Thessalonians

I do not pretend to have surveyed all commentaries on 1 Thessalonians written after Gilliard's article appeared. However, I have examined six of them written in English. These include the commentaries by Leon Morris (revised 1991), D. Michael Martin (1995), Abraham J. Malherbe (2000), Gene Green (2002), Ben Witherington (2006), and Gordon Fee (2009).

Leon Morris's commentary, first published in 1959, was thoroughly revised for the 1991 edition, to the extent that the editor, F. F. Bruce, stated that Morris's "revision takes account of nearly everything of relevance and significance that has been published during the past thirty years" (Morris 1991, viii–ix). One change is from using the ASV to the NIV, which has a comma after "the Jews" in 1 Thess 2.14. Morris does not address the punctuation directly (or the Greek text that underlies it), but appears to accept the non-restrictive interpretation of the text:

> This reference to persecution leads on to a denunciation of the Jews more severe than anything else in the Pauline writings ... Paul begins with the accusation that they [i.e. the Jews] had killed the Lord Jesus, this being apparently the one place where he says that "the Jews" were responsible for the death of Jesus. (Morris 1991, 83, 83–84)

However, between these two statements Morris explicitly rejects such an interpretation: "But Paul is not here writing about all Jews, but only those involved in the activities he names."[16] In other words, Morris apparently believes that the grammar (whether English or Greek is not made clear) indicates all Jews, but his better (theological?) judgment knows that Paul could have only meant those who performed such acts. Gilliard does not enter into his discussion at any point.

In his author's preface, D. Michael Martin notes that the NIV, used in the New American Commentary series, is "less literal and more interpretive" than he would at times like, indicating that there would be situations where he would revert back to a more literal rendering (Martin 1995, [11], [11-12]). First Thessalonians 2.14–15 is apparently not one of those places. Martin accepts the NIV without offering another rendering. In fact, he says, "This is the only instance in which Paul charged 'the Jews' with the death of Jesus" (1995, 90). However, he earlier paraphrases the passage as if the translation

[16] In a footnote, Morris (1991, 83 n. 75) cites an article by W. D. Davies where he distinguishes between "Jews," "Israelites," and "Hebrews," so that the Jews are seen as a subset of all Israelites. He also cites in support I. H. Marshall (New Century Bible, ad loc.) who cites W. Marxsen.

and his understanding are restrictive: "The Jews who opposed the gospel were condemned soundly. A series of ascriptive participles castigate [*sic*] the Jews who killed Jesus, killed the prophets, drove out the apostles, who were not pleasing to God, and were enemies." He then also clarifies his understanding of "the Jews": "Here ... 'the Jews' is used as a reference not to the people as a whole nor even to those who remained Jews religiously but to those Jews who actively opposed the spread of the gospel" (1995, 90, 90-91).[17] The only language-based argument he offers in support is that he takes the aorist participles translated "killed" and "drove us out" as "reflect[ing] specific events in the past," and thus indicating "that Paul was thinking of specific instances of persecution, which had already concluded, rather than opposition in general" (1995, 91). Unfortunately, this interpretation of the aorist participle will not bear this weight as indicating past and particular events (especially with the following two present participles), and so this argument is not germane.[18] Again, there is no reference to Gilliard.

Gene Green does not present a translation in his commentary, but on the basis of his comments, it appears that he accepts the non-restrictive understanding. He states that in v. 15 Paul "launches a strong polemic against the Jewish people" (2002, 143).[19] He further states, "the pointed rhetoric is not unique in Paul's writings," at which point he lists a number of passages about Paul's views of "the Jews," including God not rejecting them and Paul having hope for their salvation. As a result, "these verses in 1 Thessalonians should be read in light of the larger context of Paul's teaching," which also criticized Gentiles. Nevertheless, "Paul is, at times, a bit less 'politically correct' than we would like him to be. This section, however, does not justify any form of anti-Semitism among Christians." It is probably good that Green includes the last statement, because he goes on to say, "the author [presumably he means Paul] declares that the Jews are those *who killed the Lord Jesus*." By this, Green apparently means "the Jews" non-restrictively:

> Although Jesus died under the Roman procurator Pontus [*sic*] Pilate, as the Gospels and the Apostles' Creed declare ..., over and again the Gospels and Acts show the responsibility of the Jewish community in Jerusalem for this deed, including both the religious authorities and the populace in general.

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[17] In a footnote, Martin clarifies that "It is not Judaism that is condemned in these verses but active Jewish opposition to Christianity" (1995, 91 n. 60).

[18] See virtually all recent discussion of verbal aspect in Greek, in particular on the use of the aorist participle. See n. 12 above.

[19] Green rejects the interpolation view, but provides a confusing footnote (143 n. 27). He states that there are a number of authors who argue for this passage being an interpolation. However, in the note, two of the five authors he cites argue for authenticity.

However, Green also states, "this verse is the only place in the Paulines where this frank accusation appears" (2002, 144). Green accepts the non-restrictive view in a generally unqualified way and provides no linguistic discussion of the basis of this position. Gilliard's article is nowhere to be found.[20]

Ben Witherington does not provide a translation, nor does he provide clear indicators of where he is in the text. According to his rhetorical analysis,[21] 1 Thess 2.15 begins a *synkrisis* or comparison (2006, 83).[22] Witherington's discussion of our passage is contained mostly within an excursus on whether Paul was anti-Semitic. Witherington argues against such a position, first by dismissing several potentially misleading arguments, and then assuming the restrictive view. He equates 1 Thess 2.13–16 with what Paul says in Romans about "Jews who have rejected the gospel" (2006, 84). He takes 1 Thess 2.15 as being akin to passages within the prophetic tradition that criticize the Jewish leaders. Thus, "this critique of wicked leaders cannot be globalized such that the one delivering it can be accused of critiquing all Jews" (2006, 85). As to the possible objection that "here Jews, or at least Jewish officials, are accused of killing Jesus," Witherington points out that Paul knew that capital punishment was the responsibility of the Roman officials, even if the Jewish leaders were involved (2006, 85). This is the same view he takes in the commentary itself, without argument: "Vv. 15 and 16 should be seen in part as a form of the long-standing prophetic critique of Jewish leaders who rejected prophetic figures" (2006, 88). There is no discussion of the Greek text or of translation.[23] There is no discussion of Gilliard or of Amphoux, nor any reference to them in the bibliography.

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[20] However, Green does know of the later article by Gilliard (1994), cited in his bibliography and included in a footnote as one of the many sources on this passage (2002, 143 n. 27). It does not appear that he interacts with it in any substantive way, even though it indicates a restricted view.

[21] This rhetorical criticism is itself subject to strong criticism. See Porter and Dyer 2012.

[22] However, he also provides an odd footnote, in which he claims that there is an extensive (100-page) discussion of "this pericope" in K. P. Donfried and Johannes Beutler, eds. (he fails to note Beutler's involvement), *The Thessalonians Debate: Methodological Discord or Methodological Synthesis?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 31–131. However, these pages are dedicated to 1 Thess 2.1–12, not 1 Thess 2.13–16.

[23] This does not keep Witherington (2006, 85–86) from other language-related discussion. He claims that "drove us out" is to be preferred over "persecuted us" on the basis of the participle being an aorist, as persecution had continued but the events in Thessalonika that he believes are being referred to apparently had been completed in the past. See also p. 86 on the aorist *ephthasen* as indicating action that "has already come." The non-temporal nature of the Greek participles has been noted above. I believe the same is true of the indicatives.

I now treat Abraham Malherbe's commentary, even though it was published before Green's or Witherington's. After providing his own translation *without a comma* after "the Jews," Malherbe is clear and to the point when commenting on 1 Thess 2.15:

> Paul now elaborates on the actions of the Jews, who are the grammatical antecedents to "who." He does not speak of all Jews, but of those who acted against their fellow Jews. The comma that is printed between vv 14 and 15 in Greek editions of the text (unless they are following German punctuation practices rather than the Greek itself) and in modern translations is wrong, for it would set off a nonrestrictive clause that does not limit the action described to particular Jews, but would generalize it (see Gilliard for the grammatical and textual arguments). (2000, 169)[24]

Not only does Malherbe refer to Gilliard, but he notes the problem with English translations, as well as the need to alter our printed Greek texts, such as the UBS GNT and Nestle-Aland[27].[25]

The final commentary I will mention is by Gordon Fee (2009). Even though he retains the TNIV translation with the comma at the end of 1 Thess 2.14, he also includes a footnote stating that the TNIV and other English translations "put a nonrestrictive comma there. But there are good reasons to pause on this matter," noting that the "entire sentence, in fact, makes far more sense if the 'who' is understood as restrictive" (2009, 90 n. 16).[26] After citing the difficulties of the passage, including discussion of those who wished to delete the text as too difficult—Fee calls this "a counsel of despair" because of the lack of evidence—he offers an exegesis of the passage without the comma. First Thessalonians 2.15–16 is a "long litany against a sector of the Jewish community's sins against Jesus and his followers" (2009, 94). He blames much of the difficulty on the fact that verse numbers and punctuation were inserted in the text, with the result that "the comma [probably inserted because of the following verse number] has been a major factor in the historic (almost certainly incorrect) interpretation of

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[24] I note that Green does not refer to Malherbe in his entire section on 1 Thess 2.13–16, and Witherington cites him four times, but not on this issue.

[25] Besides the UBS GNT and Nestle-Aland[27], I have also checked Tischendorf[7,8], Westcott-Hort, Weymouth, Scrivener (AV/ASV comparison), ASV Greek, British and Foreign Bible Society[1,2], Souter[1,2], Trinitarian Bible Society (reconstructed Authorized Version), Robinson and Pierpont Byzantine text, Hodges and Farstad Majority Text[2], and A *Reader's Greek New Testament* (behind the NIV). They all have the comma. The only one that does not is *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition*, edited by Michael W. Holmes.

[26] Here Fee cites the articles by Gilliard and Amphoux, and in opposition Verhoef.

the entire clause." Fee notes that the participial construction found in v. 15 is "rarely if ever, nonrestrictive in Paul's letters," including all six occurrences in the letter before this one (2009, 94).[27] He concludes that "especially this passage allows for no continuation of the long history of anti-Semitism that has plagued the Christian church for centuries" (2009, 103). The only thing Fee fails to do is cite Malherbe as a prior interpreter who also understood the passage correctly.[28]

I think that there is something important to be said about commentary writing, as well as creating translations and printed editions of the Greek New Testament, and interpretation of the Greek text. Many commentary writers are clearly not as attentive to matters of Greek or English grammar as they should be. Many are not even attentive to the secondary literature or other commentary writers.

b. Recent Translations

Without being exhaustive, I also note that a number of translations have been published since Gilliard's article. These include NRSV (1989), CEV (1995), NET Bible (1996), NLT (1996), HCSB (1999) and its revision (2010), ESV (2001), CEB (2010), and revised NIV (2011). Here is how these translations render the end of 1 Thess 2.14 and the beginning of 2.15.

> NRSV (1989): "for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out." The NRSV, like the RSV before it (as already noted and as we will see below on the ESV), retains the comma and non-restrictive understanding.
> CEV (1995): "And so, you were mistreated by your own people, in the same way they [God's churches in Judea] were mistreated by their people. Those evil people killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and they even chased us away." The CEV has somewhat mitigated reference to "the Jews" by eliminating direct reference to them. However, they seem to retain the non-restrictive sense, although it is possible that "evil people" refers only to the people who mistreated those in Judea.
> NET Bible (1996): "you too suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they in fact did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord

[27] These include 1 Thess 1.7, 10; 2.4, 10, 12, 14. Fee's only grammatical difficulty is his taking the article as a "definite article" and translating it literally as "*the* also killing Jesus ones" (2009, 95).
[28] So far as I can tell, Fee does not cite Malherbe (though he knows and uses the commentary) in this entire section on 1 Thess 2.14–16.

Jesus and the prophets and persecuted us severely." The NET Bible retains the comma and non-restrictive sense. Even in such a heavily annotated Bible there is no note at this crucial point.

NLT (1996): "In this way, you imitated the believers in God's churches in Judea who, because of their belief in Christ Jesus, suffered from their own people, the Jews. For some of the Jews had killed their own prophets, and some even killed the Lord Jesus." The NLT makes it clear two times that the Jews referred to are restricted to "some," not all.

HCSB (1999): "you have also suffered the same things from people of your own country, just as they did from the Jews. They killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and persecuted us." The HCSB does not use a comma, instead dividing the syntax at this point. Nevertheless, they have a non-restrictive sense. This was retained in the 2007 edition of the HCSB *Apologetics Study Bible*, but with a potentially confusing note on 1 Thess 2.14–16 that says that accusing Paul of being anti-Semitic "misunderstands the text," as Paul was himself a Jew, as were many early Christians, and he was referring to those who were involved in Christian persecution (Cabal 2007, 1791).[29] The translation is changed in the 2010 *HCSB Study Bible* to the following: "you have also suffered the same things from people of your own country, just as they did from the Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and persecuted us." Unfortunately, the notes included at 1 Thess 2.15 do not appear to have been altered, as they read thus: "*They* refers to the Jews of verse 14. This is the only place in Paul's writings where he identified those who were responsible for Jesus' death" (Blum and Howard 2010, 2068). This probably indicates that the translation was changed at the last minute—or at least after the author had composed the study notes—but that the notes were not changed.

ESV (2001): "For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out." This is exactly the same as the RSV. The ESV clearly missed an opportunity to correct the RSV and become truly "essentially literal"[30] and, in fact, accurate.

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[29] I find it interesting to note that the study notes for 1 Thessalonians were written by Michael W. Holmes (see above, n. 25).

[30] This is a shibboleth that is used by those who support the ESV to describe their style of translation. They clearly did not fulfill their intentions or stated desires here. See Grudem et al. 2005; Ryken 2009; 2011. Part of the thrust of this movement is the aggrandizement of the Authorized Version (and the criticism of other types of translation). I don't see the virtue in preserving such translation if it results in wrong understandings, especially if they potentially involve anti-Semitism.

CEB (2010): "This was because you also suffered the same things from your own people as they did from the Jews. They killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out." The CEB breaks up the Greek syntax and retains the non-restrictive interpretation.
NIV revised (2011): "You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out." The revised NIV has altered its rendering from the non-restrictive use (noted above) similar to the ESV and RSV to the restrictive use.

I find it interesting to observe that what could probably be called the most dynamic of the translations examined (what some might consider the farthest from the original), the NLT, is also the most clearly accurate, followed by two other moderately dynamic translations, the revised NIV and the HCSB 2010, while the translations that pride themselves on being the most formally equivalent, such as the NRSV, NET Bible, and ESV simply retain the traditional translation.[31] I am disappointed to report that translations that purport to be more reflective of contemporary usage (and hence dynamic in orientation) can also be non-restrictive in their renderings, such as the CEV (although possibly ambiguous) and CEB.

Greek Language, Tradition, and Translation

From this survey of this particular—though very important and potentially inflammatory—issue, what can we observe regarding Bible translation and exegesis? I think that there are a number of important observations to make, assuming that this one example is probably not unique and represents a number of similar instances, even if they are not as significant as this one.

1. Greek editions. The first is that the standard Greek editions of the New Testament are themselves the result of interpretation. I believe strongly that scholars should return to the text for their interpretation. However, apart from the SBL edition of Holmes, all of the editions that I surveyed had the comma at the end of 1 Thess 2.14, resulting in a non-restrictive Greek clause, usually retained in English versions. There are perhaps two observations to make at this point. As this instance shows, the standard Greek editions themselves are the product of modern scholarship and reflect a number of interpretive decisions, including (though not restricted to) punctuation. Some of these simply involve editors following previous editorial decisions. Others reflect conventions of other languages, such as English or German (and the

[31] On the issues of these types of translation and how they compare, see Porter 2009.

influence of German on the Greek text of Nestle-Aland is quite possible). Others still, perhaps more insidiously, may reflect the textual enshrinement of a particular bias, in this case perhaps even a nationalistic or other anti-Semitic bias. The second observation is that this is certainly an argument for a much more restrained punctuation apparatus in any Greek edition, and perhaps even an argument against using the standard modern editions and an argument for the use of single-manuscript editions, such as an edition based upon Sinaiticus, which are not encumbered by modern punctuation conventions.[32] Sinaiticus has some textual markings to be sure, but it was created before the standardization of punctuation, and so is free of the later biases of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship, whether German or English. Such a single-text edition would need to have some punctuation, but perhaps it would be better to begin with Sinaiticus' minimal punctuation than a tradition that already enshrines an anti-Semitic comma.

2. History of interpretation. There is much contemporary noise being made about the theological interpretation of Scripture based upon early church interpretation. A passage such as this, especially if it is representative of other passages, provides a good argument against the invocation of premodern interpretation.[33] As noted above, there was a serious rise in anti-Semitism from at least the second century on, and interpretation of this passage, as Gilliard has recounted (1989, 493–98), may well have played a role in such anti-Semitism. I have no doubt that the choice to punctuate the text as it has traditionally been punctuated is part of a tradition of anti-Semitic bias in some quarters of interpretation. It is sad that scholars have not been more reflective in their interpretations throughout the years, and especially in more recent times. I cannot believe that invoking this kind of interpretation is a good thing. I believe that we have made progress in our knowledge of this passage by recognizing that the restrictive interpretation brings this passage in line with other Pauline thought, is more consistent with understanding of the Greek text (with no comma), and is better reflected in an English rendering without the comma.

If I might be permitted to speculate for a moment, the history of interpretation could have gone very differently if we had never put in a comma or never understood the passage to be non-restrictive. If we had not had strong anti-Semitic influence, resulting in a compulsion to place an unnecessary comma in the Greek text, which in turn resulted in particular translational

[32] This is a proposal I have made before, and make again in Porter forthcoming a, ch. 2.
[33] There are many other good reasons. See Porter forthcoming b. We can think of early church thought regarding not only anti-Semitism but the role of women, slavery, and general church order as problematic, among other issues.

renderings, or if we had instead used early unpunctuated or at least underpunctuated Greek texts, and if as a result Baur and his followers had not felt compelled to rewrite the history of early Christianity, and if German scholarship (and perhaps even culture) had not continued to find textual and theological justification for anti-Semitism, and if other interpreters had not been so quick simply to follow preceding scholarship and had examined the Greek and English afresh—if any of this had been true, then perhaps history would have been very different, and we would not even need now to speak of anti-Semitism, at least in relation to those purporting to be Christians. Of course, no one can know how history would have been different, but it is worth thinking about. At the least, we see that a comma can make quite a difference to interpretation.

3. Commentaries. As illustrated above, many of the commentaries written since Gilliard's article know nothing of either his article or the issues of Greek interpretation surrounding it. Some, though not all, of them realize that their restrictive interpretation is at odds with the usual printed Greek text and its usual translation, but few (with the obvious exceptions of Malherbe and Fee) recognize that the problem resides with the standard Greek editions and the English translations, not with Paul. Even if commentators do not accept all of the claims of Gilliard, they are at least obligated to respond to his arguments and say why they do not accept them. Most do not do so. In fact, they do not even acknowledge that Gilliard's article exists. An all-too-frequent response to the difficulties of this passage is not to achieve better textual criticism or exegesis (the elimination of a simple comma) or understanding of Greek, but to posit theories of later interpolation, such as might rightly be considered a counsel of despair brought on by failure to come to terms with the text, or to endorse interpretation that must go against the assumed text. On the basis of examination of this passage, it is questionable whether we need more commentaries that simply repeat and rehash (even with new exegetical legerdemain to justify their readings) the tried and true interpretations, rather than examining afresh the Greek text, not just the standard critical editions, with linguistically informed eyes. On the basis of some of the other incidental linguistic observations I have made, it is possible that such a task is perhaps beyond the expertise of some commentary writers—in which case they should probably not be writing such commentaries at all.

4. English translations. English translations are the means by which most English-speaking Christians have access to their Scriptures. The burden upon translators is an incredibly heavy one—one that they dare not shoulder lightly. I am encouraged to note that the NLT has interpreted the passage correctly, that the HCSB translation has corrected its rendering, and that the revised NIV has also expressed the meaning more accurately in its

latest version. I am greatly troubled that other translations continue, apparently uncritically, to reflect the received tradition, even though there has been serious scholarship that has provided convincing evidence that the translations are incorrect, in part because the standard Greek editions are punctuated with a comma that, rightly or wrongly (mostly wrongly it appears), influences English translation. I am even more bothered that certain translations promote themselves as being more accurate than others because they purport to be closer to the meaning of the Greek text—what some have called "essentially literal" translation—when they are in fact quite the opposite. They perpetuate the wrong tradition, make no acknowledgment of the fact, seem simply to accept the received rendering, and end up farther from the exegetical sense than more dynamic translations that render the passage correctly. There is no doubt a lesson here about what it means to be either a literal or a dynamic translation, and about the rhetoric that too often accompanies each.

Conclusion

I realize that I am exaggerating to suggest that a single comma, whether in the standard Greek editions we use or our translations, could have changed the course of history. But perhaps the exaggeration is not too great. This small lesson in interpretation and translation has made clear, I think, that the task of biblical interpretation, which includes establishing the Greek text and its translation, is a difficult one. Unfortunately, the history of translation and commenting upon the text is probably full of instances of those who have failed to take the task as seriously as they needed to. However, we can also be very thankful for the efforts and successes that have been made. There are no doubt more of these than the other. Nevertheless, some of the failures have had huge consequences, perhaps even consequences that we cannot even imagine. I am very thankful for the opportunity I have had to work with Roger Omanson for a number of years. He is one of those who have continued to work hard at the task of understanding our Scriptures. It is in tribute to him that I, and my fellow contributors, offer him this work.

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