

Seeing Old Testament National Promises In Light of New Covenant Fulfillment

A Study of the Use of Quotations from Hosea 1–2 in Romans 9:25-26

by Dr. J. Paul Tanner

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the crucial issues in biblical hermeneutics is the question of how to deal with Israel as the *people of God*. Closely related to this is the matter of interpreting the Old Testament promises to Israel. Has the church *replaced* Israel (a view sometimes referred to as Replacement Theology)?¹ Did Israel by her disobedience and especially her rejection of Jesus as Messiah *forfeit* her place in God's plan? Is the church a totally distinct entity with a separate mission and separate program of salvation?

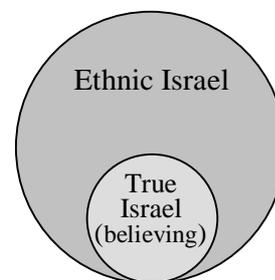
These questions are nowhere more pertinent than when it comes to the matter of Old Testament quotations found in the New Testament. While there are no clear verses demonstrating that Israel has forfeited her role and been permanently cast off by God, nor are there verses that clearly state that the church has replaced Israel, we are still left with the challenge of having to explain how certain Old Testament verses originally uttered to Israel are "used" in regard to Gentiles of the church. How do we explain this phenomenon? As a case in point, this paper will consider the use of verses from chapters 1–2 of Hosea in Romans 9 by the Apostle Paul. How does his use of these verses affect our hermeneutical understanding of Israel and what it means to be "the people of God"?

¹ Walter C. Kaiser, "An Assessment of 'Replacement Theology,'" *Mishkan* 10:9-20.

II. The Context of Romans 9: The "True Israel"

In Romans 9–11 the Apostle Paul, having carefully developed the doctrines of justification and sanctification in the earlier part of his epistle, seeks to explain what bearing these have upon Israel as the people of God. If righteousness is not gained by keeping the Law (Rom 3:20) and one can only be declared righteous before God based on faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:28-30), then what does this say about Israel who was instructed by God to keep the Law?

In Rom 9:6, Paul emphatically addresses the issue: "But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel." His comments at this point have really nothing to do with those who are Gentiles, as though "God's Israel" was a people composed of Jew and Gentile. In the context, he is clearly talking about the Jewish people. Furthermore, this is



Rom 9:6 – "they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel"

undoubtedly linked back to what he had said earlier in Rom 2:28-29, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God." In other words, being Jewish by birth did not guarantee a person a right standing with God. That had to be accompanied by "circumcision of the heart" (cf. Deut 30:6) and partaking of the Holy Spirit—both being matters related to the promise doctrine of the New Covenant. Thus, Rom 9:6 is a way of saying that there is a "true Israel" within "ethnic Israel," and this true Israel is the believing remnant of the nation. For God to fulfill His promises to Israel, He need not do so with every single physical descendant but only with the believing element within ethnic Israel.

That this is the proper interpretation is further confirmed by the way he consistently distinguishes Israel from the Gentiles throughout the remainder of Rom 9–11. A clear case for this is found in Rom

9:30-31, "What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law." Certainly the term "Israel" cannot mean "the church," because he clearly distinguishes Israel from the believing Gentiles and even affirms that Israel (as a whole) failed to attain to God's righteousness.

When he comes to Romans 11, he clarifies this conception of Israel as a two-part entity—ethnic Israel of unbelief versus the believing "remnant." God's covenant promises to Israel (carefully stated in the Old Testament) have not failed, because God is fulfilling them with the believing remnant. Thus, he can say in Rom 11:1, "I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be." Then in vs 5 he adds, "In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice." Thus, Israel has not *forfeited* her role in God's salvation plan, though we need to understand that it is with the believing remnant of the nation that God fulfills His promises of blessing.

III. THE OLD TESTAMENT QUOTATIONS IN ROMANS 9:25-29

In Romans 9:25-29, the Apostle Paul links together a series of four quotations from the Old Testament, two from Hosea and two from Isaiah. It is critical to understand the context in which these are set forth. In the earlier part of the chapter, Paul clarified that God's covenant promises need not be fulfilled with every single Israelite (9:6-7). Not all of Abraham's descendants are included! When Paul introduces the doctrine of *election* in Romans 9, it is in the context of clarifying that those who comprise the believing remnant of Israel are *chosen by God for participation*. This ensures that there will be a believing remnant, so that God's promises will not fail!

The fact that God *chooses/elects* those who are included in the believing remnant raises a question about the justice of God in doing so. Thus Paul, anticipating an imaginary objector, seeks to explain why God's election of the believing remnant is not unjust. It is not unjust for the very reason that it is

not based on merit, but on the sheer mercy of God. What makes his argument so striking, however, is that he extends this concept to Gentiles, and seeks to show that God has chosen some from both Gentiles and Jews to be objects of His mercy. We could summarize His flow of thought this way:

9:19-21 Because God is sovereign, no one has a right to question His method by which some are chosen for salvation.

9:22-24 Whoever is chosen for salvation (whether Jew or Gentile) is chosen strictly on the basis of *God's mercy*.

Paul did not have to bring the Gentiles into the picture, since his primary argument was to show that the believing remnant of Israel is comprised of those who have been chosen by God to this privileged role. However, including Gentiles in the discussion does reinforce the point that God is impartial, and has not even limited His election to one ethnic people descended from Abraham. God is not unjust in His dealings.

Paul labels those who have been chosen by God as "vessels of mercy" (9:23). In verse 24, Paul clarifies that these are not limited to those of Jewish descent: "even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles." It is at this point that Paul inserts the series of quotations from the Old Testament (vv 25-29). Then, following the OT quotations, he summarizes by saying:

"What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law" (Rom 9:30-31).

These Old Testament quotations are bracketed by verses 22-24 beforehand, and by verses 30-31 following. When we compare verses 22-24 with verses 30-31, it becomes apparent that the Old Testament quotations sandwiched in-between are intended to serve the purpose of proving that God's

mercy has been extended to both a remnant of Israel and to Gentiles. Notice the words "What shall we say then?" that introduce verse 30, and which obviously introduce a conclusion he has reached. If in vs 24 he introduces the inclusion of Gentiles in God's mercy, and reiterates in his conclusion beginning in vs 30 that Gentiles attained righteousness, then we can safely infer that in these Old Testament quotations he is offering proof for the inclusion of both in God's mercy.²

At this point, we must examine the quotations to see which pertain to Gentiles and which to Jews. I will start by looking at the latter two quotations in Rom 9:27-29. One is a quotation from Isa 10:22-23, and this is followed by a quotation from Isa 1:9. Both have to do with a remnant from Israel. Paul is using these two quotations to support his case that God has chosen "vessels of mercy" from ethnic Israel, and this is confirmed by the way he introduces the verses: "And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel." If then, these two quotations from Isaiah support the case of the believing remnant of Israel being included in God's mercy, we would expect to find support for the case of Gentile inclusion in one or both of the other two quotations found in 9:25-26. In these verses, Paul first quotes from Hosea 2:23 and then from 1:10:

"I will call those who were not My people, 'My People,' and her who was not beloved, 'Beloved'" [from Hosea 2:23].

"And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God" [from Hosea 1:10].

² Any attempt to argue that the Hosea quotations were used by Paul in Romans to argue for the inclusion of ethnic Israel must certainly be rejected. This position, though rare, can be found in Alva J. McClain, *The Gospel of God's Grace* (Chicago: Moody, 1973), 183; and John A. Battle, Jr., "Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:25-26," *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (1981): 115-29.

In quoting from these verses, Paul does not provide a handy introduction such as "Now concerning the Gentiles" (similar to what he did with Israel in 9:27). Yet, this is the only place in the string of quotations that the case of Gentiles could have been established from Scripture, and we can safely conclude that Paul is indeed quoting these verses in Hosea to establish the point that God's "vessels of mercy" must include Gentiles.³

Thus, Paul uses this string of quotations to prove that God's mercy has been extended to a believing remnant within Israel and to prove that it has been extended to Gentiles. To prove the case of the remnant of Israel, he provides two quotations from Isaiah. To prove the case of Gentiles, he offers two quotations from Hosea. Now, there is no real tension about his use of the verses from Isaiah, but his use of Hosea raises significant questions, especially at the hermeneutical level. Is Paul using these verses from Hosea in the same way (i.e., with the same meaning) that the prophet himself did? Even more pointedly, is Paul *violating* the use of these verses by offering them as proof of Gentiles being made "My people"? And if he is using them in some sort of valid way, how can we explain what he is doing and what kind of hermeneutics are involved?

³ I am indebted to W. Edward Glenny for this insight in his excellent article "The 'People of God' in Romans 9:25-26" (*Bibliotheca Sacra* 152:605 (Jan-Mar 1995): 42-59. Moo likewise draws the same conclusion that Paul's OT support for the calling of Gentiles must be drawn from Hosea (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996], 611). For a dissenting position, however, see David L. Turner, "The Continuity of Scripture and Eschatology: Key Hermeneutical Issues," *Grace Theological Journal* 6:2 (Fall 1985): 275-87. Following John Battle's earlier work, Turner contends that Paul is not thinking primarily of the church in Rom 9:25-26 but "of the present unbelief and future restoration of the nation of Israel" (281).

IV. THE HOSEA QUOTATIONS IN THEIR ORIGINAL CONTEXT

When we go back to the book of Hosea and carefully examine these quotations, it quickly becomes apparent that Hosea 2:23 (Paul's first quotation) and Hosea 1:10 have a very close relationship. Let me first quote from Hosea 2:23, despite the fact that it *appears* to differ somewhat from the way it reads in Romans 9:25:

Hosea 2:23

"I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, and I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!'"

Romans 9:25

"I will call those who were not My people, 'My People,' and her who was not beloved, 'Beloved.'"

Although at first glance the verses may not appear to be so similar, this is only an illusion created by the fact that (1) Paul is quoting from a Greek Septuagint manuscript of Hosea, and (2) he reverses the order of the clauses (perhaps to stress the "My people" aspect of the promise and God's "call" upon them).⁴ In the original verse, two issues are prominent: God's exercise of "compassion" and the "My people" status. Both of these are vitally related to Hosea 1:10 in its immediate context, i.e., in Hosea 1:1–2:1a. In Hosea 1:6, for instance, God uses the symbolic name of Hosea's child *Lō-ruḥāmāh*

⁴ Moo (612) notes that Paul has also switched Hosea's "I will say" to "I will call," probably in view of 9:24. He explains, "This is almost certainly Paul's own change since it matches the point for which he adduces the quotations (cf. "call" in v.24). By reversing the order of the clauses in his quotation of Hos. 2:23, Paul is able to put this verb at the beginning of his composite quotation from Hosea." [Note that we also find the term "call" at the end of vs. 26]. This is vital to the argument, for God's call logically follows His act of predestination.

(לֹא רַחֲמִים = no compassion) to announce that His "compassion" is being removed from the northern kingdom of Israel in Hosea's day. This was in anticipation of the divine discipline to come by way of the Assyrian incursions of the 8th century BC, culminating with the exile of 722 BC. The name of Hosea's third child *Lō-‘ammi* (לֹא עַמִּי = not my people) is used to explain that those of the northern kingdom were being disinherited as God's "people." The southern kingdom, in contrast, would continue to experience God's compassion (e.g., God would spare them from the Assyrian menace) and would be regarded as God's "people."

Not all of Hosea 1:10 is quoted by Paul in Romans 9:26. Verse 10a (the unquoted portion) states, "Yet the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered." These words have a striking allusion to what had been promised Abraham centuries earlier through the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 22:17; 32:12; cf. 13:15-16). The point of this allusion in Hosea 1:10 is to affirm that although the northern kingdom in Hosea's day was being cut off from covenant favor, God still considered Himself bound to His promises made to the nation under the Abrahamic covenant. Furthermore, this truth remained the basis for God's future compassion to be re-extended to the nation.⁵ This is established in Hosea 1:10b (the portion quoted by Paul):

⁵ The timing for the fulfillment of these promises to the nation is *hinted at* in Hosea 1:11 when the prophet declares, "And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together, and they will appoint for themselves one leader." This is amplified in Ezekiel 37:21ff. In Ezek 37:21, God declares that He will gather them from the nations where they had been dispersed and will bring them back to the land. Then (vs 22) there will be a reunion of the nation when "one king will be king for all of them" (hence, *one leader*). God will then cleanse them (vs 23), with the result that once again "they will be My people, and I will be their God." Finally, vs 24 declares that "My servant David will be king over them" (a reference to Messiah). Yet even Hosea 1:11 is given clarification within its own context, for in Hosea 3:5 the prophet declares, "Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to

the LORD and to His goodness in the last days." [The expression "in the last days" has its roots in Deut 4:25-31 where the nation returns to the LORD after being "in distress"—an early anticipation of her *salvation* from future tribulation—a theme which is amplified throughout the Old Testament].

Hosea 1:10b

"And it will come about that, in the place where it is said to them, 'You are not My people,' it will be said to them, 'You are the sons of the living God.'"

Romans 9:26

"And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'you are not My people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God."

In the context of Hosea, this was used to indicate a *change of status*. In Hosea's day, a portion of Abraham's descendants were being disavowed . . . removed from covenant privilege. In some future day, there would be a *status change*, and they would go from being "not My people" to being "My people." This concept of "My people" harkened back to the nation's early history, and especially to the agreement that was reached at Mt. Sinai after they came out of Egypt. In exchange for their agreement to keep the Mosaic Law, God offered them the right of being his privileged "people."

"Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6).

This same thought was echoed later in Deuteronomy:

"But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today" (Deut 4:20; cf. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Lev 26:12).

Clearly from the context of Hosea 1–2, both passages (2:23 and 1:10b) have Old Testament Israel in view, and the northern kingdom in particular. Nothing in the context of these passages makes reference to Gentiles, nor does Hosea imply that the fulfillment of these promises will be with Gentiles rather than with Israel. Of course, if one's theology has already predetermined that the

church is the "new Israel" (i.e., the church *replaces* Israel), then perhaps this strange use of Hosea in Romans could be explained in light of that.⁶ However, that theological position seems to the present writer to be fraught with problems. In the most extended treatment of "Israel" in the New Testament (i.e., Romans 9–11), the Apostle Paul clearly distinguishes Israel from the church, as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, there is the matter of many Old Testament predictions for Israel that simply cannot legitimately be said to find fulfillment in the church—passages like the promise that Israel will have to go through the "time of Jacob's distress" (Jer 30:7) when God declares, "I will chasten you justly, and will by no means leave you unpunished" (Jer 30:11).⁷ Other examples could easily be brought forward, such as the prediction concerning Judah and Jerusalem that "all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it" (Zech 12:3) to be followed by the Lord's personal return to deliver her (Zech 14:1-9).

Yet, if the original context of Hosea suggests that these verses from Hosea 1–2 quoted by Paul in Romans were truly intended for literal Israel, do we not have a fundamental problem lacking explanation? This has all the appearances of a serious *misuse* of Scripture by the Apostle. Knowing that "all Scripture is inspired by God," however, we can be confident that there is a better explanation

⁶ Compare Moo's explanation for Paul's use of Hosea: "Therefore we must conclude that this text reflects a hermeneutical supposition for which we find evidence elsewhere in Paul and in the NT: that OT predictions of a renewed Israel find their fulfillment in the church" (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 613).

⁷ It will not do to say that these verses in Jeremiah pertain *only* to the period of the Babylonian captivity. In the midst of this context in Jeremiah 30, the prophet declares not only Israel's return to the land and restoration, but also that "they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king." The latter phrase "David their king" surely refers to the Messiah to come from David's seed (compare Jer 23:5-6 and 33:15), and thus looks to the *messianic age* of the future for its fulfillment.

for what is taking place. Marvin Wilson hints at a pathway to such a satisfactory explanation when he remarks,

Upon close examination of Scripture, many of the details about Israel's future must remain obscure and uncertain for several reasons. First, the hermeneutic employed by the New Testament writers indicates that many Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in ways totally unexpected by both the Old Testament authors themselves and the Jewish people of Jesus' day.⁸

I would like to contend that the fulfillment of the Hosea verses does involve Gentiles, and yet this comes in a totally unexpected way by both Hosea and those living at the outset of the church.

V. CLARIFICATIONS REGARDING THE FULFILLMENT OF HOSEA 1–2

It would be very difficult to deny that the Apostle Paul has taken verses from Hosea 1–2 and used them in Romans 9 in regard to Gentile believers of the church. But to acknowledge that he has done this is not to say that he has *misused* Hosea or that he has *spiritualized* the meaning of these verses. What must be brought to the reader's attention is that he has NOT denied the use of these verses in regard to Israel. Perhaps, then, this is the key to the solution: for Paul to use these verses from Hosea for Gentiles does not mean that they do not pertain to Israel. We can rest assured that Paul knew and understood the meaning of these verses in their original context. He well understood that God's mercy extended to a remnant within Israel, because the very verses that he quotes in Romans 9:27-29 from Isaiah affirm this very thing. Hence, Paul is not *reinterpreting* Israel in his quotations from Hosea. I suspect that if we could sit down personally with Paul and ask his opinion about this, he would readily agree that the Hosea verses find fulfillment with Israel (i.e., with *believing* Israel). His point in

⁸ Marvin R. Wilson, *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1989), 267.

Romans 9 is not to deny a fulfillment with Israel, but only to affirm a fulfillment with Gentiles. If that is the case, then our task is no longer one of trying to explain how Israel became *reinterpreted* but explaining how the Hosea verses can *also* be true of Gentile believers in the church.

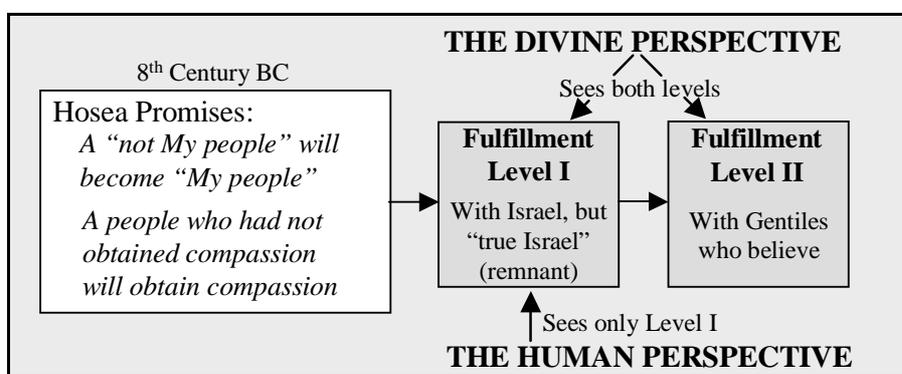
Some have suggested that the solution to the hermeneutical problem is found in Paul's intention in quoting these verses, namely that he was not trying to argue for the fulfillment of the verses with Gentiles, but only for the *application of a principle* to Gentiles.⁹ I would suggest, however, that what we have here is more than application of a principle or a mere analogy. Paul does see the conversion of Gentiles as a *direct fulfillment* of Hosea's prophecy (though not the complete fulfillment). In fact, I would go one step further and argue that there was a *common teaching* in the early church regarding the fulfillment with Gentiles of what might have appeared previously to have been the sole promises and property of Israel. The Apostle Peter, writing in 1 Peter 2:4-10 developed the picture of the church being a *spiritual temple* made up of living stones. In contrast to those who stumbled because they were disobedient to the word (a reference to unbelieving Israel; vs 8), Peter tells those "who believe":

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **a people for God's own possession**, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness

⁹ Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., "Hosea," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, ed. John Walvoord and Roy Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1386; and John A. Witmer, "Romans," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament* (1983), 478-79. Cf. S. Lewis Johnson who argues in a similar vein for an "analogical connection" between Israel and the church in the Hosea quotation in Romans 9:25-26 ("Evidence from Romans 9–11," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, ed. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend [Chicago: Moody, 1992], 199-223). As Moo points out, however, any explanation based on analogy is too inadequate to have served Paul's purposes: "But Paul requires more than an analogy to establish from Scripture justification for God's calling of Gentiles to be his people" (613).

into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are **the people of God**; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet 2:9-10; emphasis mine).

Peter is very straightforward that his audience (and surely this must include Gentiles!) are now "the people of God"—using words straight out of Exodus 19:5-6 and Hosea 2:23. Peter is not merely applying a principle to his readers; he sees his readers as *fulfillment* of these Old Testament passages.¹⁰ That is not to say, however, that he regards these verses as having complete fulfillment with Gentiles because Israel has forfeited her place of privilege before God. But he does intend to use these verses by way of fulfillment, not merely application or analogy! So, while these Old Testament verses clearly pertained to Israel—to those physically descended from Abraham—they did not have to have fulfillment with *every physical descendant*, and they had the potential to include others who were not Jewish. This would not have been anticipated from an earlier point in salvation-history, but it had become apparent in the days of the first century.



¹⁰ Cf. W. Edward Glenny, "The Israelite Imagery of 1 Peter 2," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1992), 156-87.

VI. THE HERMENEUTICAL EXPLANATION

What I have tried to argue thus far is that the Hosea promises quoted by Paul in Romans 9 actually were intended to find their fulfillment with Israel, i.e., with "true Israel" (a believing remnant), but were not exhausted by Israel. God intended the fulfillment to be more than was apparent at the time of Hosea's initial prophecy, and Gentiles would become part of the divinely intended *fulfillment process*. If this is true, then the Apostle Paul was not misusing these verses from Hosea nor was he trying to operate by some *new theological dictum* whereby Israel no longer meant Israel. He had come to understand the Gentile aspect of fulfillment. The question then remains as to how he had come to this understanding. What guided Paul in his hermeneutics?

I will begin by arguing that this "more complete understanding" of Hosea was not only incapable of recognition at the time of its original utterance (not even by Hosea himself), but was probably not even recognized initially by the *early church*. I would posit that this understanding only came to light in the course of early 1st century church history due to several converging matters.

As a starting point, I would point out that it was not until Acts 10–11 that the early church (initially Jewish) understood that Gentiles were receiving the same gift as they had received and were participating equally in the Gospel. Even with this elementary understanding, they certainly did not comprehend at that point all the implications of the New Covenant or the mystery of the church. So there was certainly a period in the life of the early church when the idea of Gentile fulfillment of certain Old Testament verses would undoubtedly have been incomprehensible. At some point following Acts 10–11, the Holy Spirit revealed the "mystery" of the church to Paul (and possibly other apostles as well). Eph 3:3 states, "by revelation (ἀποκαλύψις) there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief." Paul did not figure this out by studying Scripture alone; the Holy Spirit had to make it known to him. Unfortunately, we do not know precisely when and with whom

this revelation first occurred.¹¹ Paul may have been the first, but it is possible that the Holy Spirit may have revealed it to another apostle before him.

Paul's understanding of the Israel/church relationship probably did not crystallize before the Acts 10–11 event, and it may have even been several years afterwards before Paul began to comprehend this doctrine (or that it was revealed to him). An interesting question is whether or not these things were even understood in the church prior to the Jerusalem Council of AD 49 (Acts 15). In light of the intense debate over the role of Gentiles in God's salvation, one would think that the insights we find later in Romans 9 and 1 Peter 2 would have been brought up, or that the implications and outworking of the New Covenant would have been discussed. Yet the record we find in Acts 15 does not reflect this, despite the fact they could assert "we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are" (Acts 15:11). Thus we cannot be conclusive as to when the full understanding about the Israel/church relationship (and the kind of insights that Paul and Peter had about the outworking of Hosea 1–2) would have come about. Possibly it was not until after the Jerusalem Council, but we must be cautious about our conclusion one way or the other.

¹¹ This doctrine is clearly reflected in Ephesians and Colossians, but the common opinion is that these books were not written until Paul's first Roman imprisonment during the years AD 60-62. We are probably safe in saying that Paul had received this revelation prior to this date, but how much earlier is difficult to say. In light of statements made in 1 Corinthians about the *Spirit baptism* "into one body," Paul probably had received the revelation about the mystery of the church prior to writing 1 Corinthians, which may be dated approximately AD 54-55, some 3-4 years before writing Romans (David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, ed. John Walvoord and Roy Zuck [Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983], 505). Paul's earliest writing, Galatians (ca. AD 49, just prior to the Jerusalem Council), does reflect an understanding of the Gentiles as the seed of Abraham by faith (e.g., 3:7) and the promise of the Spirit for them (3:14). Thus, Paul's understanding of the church/Israel relationship could predate the writing of Galatians (but see comments to follow regarding the Jerusalem Council).

The more important issue, of course, is *how* Paul came to have his understanding about Hosea 1–2. It may be that this understanding was contemporaneous with the revelation of the mystery mentioned in Ephesians 3. On the other hand, we can identify several key developments that would have at least paved the way for Paul's insights into Hosea, and these are connected to the progressive understanding about the New Covenant itself.¹²

Although the original apostles did not grasp the full significance of Jesus' statement, His announcement about the New Covenant on the eve of His crucifixion would certainly have been important to their understanding in the course of time:

"And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is **the new covenant** in My blood' (Luke 22:20).

Thus, they would have realized early on that the prophesied New Covenant of the Old Testament had arrived and was in operation (though not completely fulfilled).¹³ They were no longer participants in

¹² Regarding the church and its relationship to the New Covenant, one might wish to consult Rodney J. Decker's helpful article, "The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant," *BibSac* 152 (July-Sept 1995): 290-305.

¹³ How and with whom the New Covenant promises find fulfillment is, of course, a hotly debated matter, and even within dispensationalism there has been at least three different approaches. For a helpful discussion, see Richard Daniels, "How Does the Church Relate to the New Covenant? or, Whose New Covenant Is It, Anyway?", *Faith and Mission* 16:2 (Spr 1999): 64-98. His discussion concerning the question of the church's participation in the New Covenant is stimulating, though I do not agree with his conclusion that "The New Covenant is with Israel, not with the church. The church's relationship to it is as a nonparticipating mediator between its two legal parties: God the Father and Israel" (92). For him the church benefits from the New Covenant spiritual blessings because of her role as priests (the Levitical priesthood is a valid type of the church) . . . not because the New Covenant is fulfilled with her (90).

the Old Covenant with all its cultic rituals and sacrifices. The events of the Day of Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit (also a New Covenant feature) would have heightened their understanding.¹⁴ In Ezekiel 36:24-28 the pouring out of the Holy Spirit was promised to the nation. That this was a New Covenant matter is attested by the stereo-typical phrase in Ezek 36:28, "so you will be My people, and I will be your God"—a promise found precisely in the more formal announcement of the New Covenant in Jer 31:33 (cf. Jer 30:22; 31:1). Whereas the Jeremiah passage (Jer 31:31-34) put a stress on the eternal forgiveness of sin ("for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more"), the Ezekiel passage put a stress on the pouring out of the Holy Spirit ("And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" – Ezek 36:27). Yet these were equally important aspects of the New Covenant promised by God. From an Old Testament perspective, the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 would have been a very logical consequence to the Calvary event (whereby His blood made possible eternal forgiveness).

Thus, following the Day of Pentecost, it was undoubtedly apparent to the apostles that the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah and Ezekiel was underway, and at least these aspects of the New Covenant were now being realized by the "believing remnant" of Israel (which at the beginning is all that they expected the church to be).¹⁵ The events of Acts 10–11 would have significantly escalated their understanding, and those who witnessed this stood amazed at what was happening:

¹⁴ On the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a New Covenant ministry, see Larry D. Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1993) [see especially 7-14, 27-45, and 251-70]. Cf. Paul R. Thorsell, "The Spirit in the Present Age: Preliminary Fulfillment of the Predicted New Covenant According to Paul," *JETS* 41 (1998): 397-413.

¹⁵ One need not say that *all aspects* of the New Covenant promises and expectations must find their realization in the early church. The promises and expectations of the Abrahamic Covenant are being

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. And all the circumcised believers [*Jewish Christians*] who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God" (Acts 10:44-46).

In the days that ensued, the apostles and others of the early church would have begun to recognize the full significance of what had taken place. This was not merely a matter of God saving Gentiles and forgiving their sins (Peter preached that message! – Acts 10:43), but more significantly that God also intended the Gentile believers to be full participants of the New Covenant with its additional spiritual blessing of the Holy Spirit. At first this must have been quite puzzling to them, because a *first reading* of the passages from the Old Testament about the New Covenant would not have given one the impression that Gentiles were to be included. Piecing together all these factors (beginning with Jesus' announcement of the New Covenant), it was logical to conclude: if the New Covenant is underway and Gentiles are receiving the Holy Spirit in an identical manner to believing Jews, then Gentiles must be participating in the New Covenant.¹⁶

progressively fulfilled, and by analogy this is true of the New Covenant as well. This progressive manner of fulfillment allows for a future climactic fulfillment with the believing remnant of Israel at the time of Christ's return.

¹⁶ Gentiles were participating in the New Covenant because they were "in Christ," and this had been made possible by Spirit baptism (see Pettegrew, *The New Covenant Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 268-69). To say that Gentiles were participating in the New Covenant, however, does not mean that all Old Testament promises and expectations associated with the New Covenant would be realized by believing Gentiles. Indeed, a careful reading of such passages as Jeremiah 30–31 and Ezekiel 36–37 (both of which are imbued with New Covenant thought) reveals that there are many prophetic details that can only be fulfilled with ethnic Israel in conjunction

This *New Covenant awareness* would have set the stage for a fresh understanding of the Hosea promises. As Paul (and other apostles) reflected back on Hosea, they would have noticed that the New Covenant was very much related to what God was promising to do in such passages as Hos 1:10 and 2:23. In both passages of Hosea, the stress is upon "change of status"—a change from being "not My people" to being "My people" (or in the words of Hos 1:10, a change from "not my people" to being "sons of the living God"). What makes this change of status possible? It is the New Covenant that makes this possible! As mentioned above, in both the two most prominent OT passages announcing the New Covenant (i.e., Jer 31:31-34 and Ezek 36:24-28), we also are told that the recipients of the New Covenant are made "My people." For instance, Jer 31:33 states, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (cf. Ezek 36:28).

A closer examination of the context in which Hosea 2:23 is uttered reveals that the New Covenant is very much in view.¹⁷ Just before this verse, we read in Hosea 2:18, "In that day I will also make a

with the general time of Christ's return. For example, Israel must pass through "the time of Jacob's distress" (Jer 30:7)—a probable reference to the "Great Tribulation"—in which the Lord will "chasten her justly" (Jer 30:11) . . . an event slated for "the latter days" (Jer 30:24). In the midst of this experience, the nation will plead with God and confess her sinfulness (Jer 31:18-19), and as a result the Lord will save (i.e., deliver) her from it (Jer 30:7). Following this national deliverance, the Lord will regather the portions of Israel outside the land back to the land originally promised to Abraham (Jer 30:3; 31:8,10; Ezek 36:24; 37:21). [This cannot be a "spiritualized land," because Ezekiel clarifies that it is the land "in which your fathers lived" (Ezek 37:25; cf. 36:28). We should also note the attention that is given to the agricultural blessings that follow (Ezek 36:29-30, 33-35)]. Finally, the Lord will cleanse Israel of all her spiritual unfaithfulness (Ezek 36:25, 29, 33; 37:23), and then will bring on the surviving remnant great joy and the enjoyment of His blessings (Jer 31:12).

¹⁷ For a very helpful discussion and substantiation of the New Covenant in Hosea, see Gary W. Light, "The New Covenant in the Book of Hosea," *Review and Expositor* 90 (1993): 219-38. He notes the use of several networks of metaphors throughout the book, including the marriage metaphor permeating Hos 2:2-23.

covenant for them." Although this verse does not say "new covenant" but "a covenant," the New Covenant is undoubtedly in view.¹⁸ I would support this conclusion by appealing to the words of Hosea 2:20 in the same paragraph: "And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. **Then you will know the LORD.**" This idea of "knowing the LORD" is precisely what the New Covenant is meant to accomplish according to Jer 31:34—"And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD." A further support that Hosea 2:18 has the New Covenant in view is based on the strong connections that this entire section in Hosea 2:14-23 (a *salvation-oracle* depicting future restoration) has with Ezekiel 34:20-31 and God's promise in that context of "a

Commenting on the crucial verse in 2:23, Light suggests, "It is not so much that 2:23b finally explains the metaphor, although it does demonstrate that the 'husband' of the poem is YHVH. It is more important that the metaphor in fact explains 2:23b. The confession '(You are) my God' is the entry into an intimate, personal relationship with God that goes far beyond a legal contract (covenant). Anyone who knows (*yd'*) YHVH must exclaim '*iš'*, 'my loving, beloved husband.' It is a new covenant in kind much more than in time" (229).

¹⁸ Leon Wood virtually ignores the mention of "covenant" in his commentary on Hosea 2:14-23 and makes no attempt to connect this with the New Covenant or any other covenant. He merely points to the complete fulfillment coming in the "glorious millennial reign of the future" (Leon J. Wood, "Hosea," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1985], 178-180). Andersen and Freedman, after a discussion and dismissal of any possible connection to a covenant associated with the Flood, offer no help on identifying the covenant (Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea*, The Anchor Bible [Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980], 281). Hans Walter Wolff, on the other hand, is quite explicit that the New Covenant is in view: "Regarding the content, here we have the first reference to a 'new covenant' of the endtime (cf. Jer 31:31)" (*Hosea*, Hermenia, trans. by Gary Stensell [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974]: 51; cf. page 55).

covenant of peace" (34:25) attended by blessings and security.¹⁹ Ezek 34:23-24 also foretells that "My servant David" (= Messiah) will be shepherd/prince over the people.²⁰ This Ezekiel passage has,

¹⁹ Note carefully the promise in Hosea 2:18 ("I will make them lie down in safety" – לְבִטָּחָה) and the similar promise in Ezek 34:28 ("but they will live securely – וְיִשְׁכְּבוּ לְבִטָּחָה – and no one will make them afraid"). Other prominent connections involve the agricultural blessings that will come and the removal of armies/war from the land (foreign invaders are depicted as "beasts" in Ezekiel 34:25, 28 [cf. Lev 26:6]).

²⁰ The prophetic anticipation of "My servant David" ruling over the nation at the time of the complete fulfillment of the New Covenant is observed not only in Ezek 34:23-24 but also in Ezek 37:24-25, and similarly ("David their king") in Jer 30:9 and Hos 3:5. Some have taken these promises to mean that David himself will be literally raised to rule as king over Israel in the millennium (see John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* [Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, Inc., 1990], 628; and Charles H. Dyer, "Jeremiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, ed. John Walvoord and Roy Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1168; and Dyer, "Ezekiel," 1295]. Others (including many dispensationalists) see these references as pertaining not to David but to David's greater Son, the Messiah (so H. A. Ironside, *Lamentations and Jeremiah* [Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1906], 149; Charles L. Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1969], 198, 216; John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel* [Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1969], 222-23; R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah & Lamentations* [Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973], 134; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980], 557; Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah, A Commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1982], 205; Leon J. Wood, "Hosea," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1985], 183; Ralph H. Alexander, "Ezekiel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1986], 913-14, 927-28; Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1990], 29; Lamar E. Cooper, Sr., *Ezekiel*, *The New American Commentary* [Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994], 302, 327; and Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48* [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1998], 297-301, 418).

The Messianic view is undoubtedly correct, and the application of David's name to Messiah is easily understood in light of the promises that were made to David concerning his house (i.e., dynasty) in the Davidic Covenant of 2 Sam 7. In defense of the Messianic view, we should note first that there was no mention in the original Davidic Covenant or anywhere else that David himself would rise again to rule on the eternal throne of his kingdom. No introductory word concerning resurrection is mentioned with any of the passages in question. The phrase "I will raise up for them" (אֶקְוֶם לָהֶם) in Jer 30:9 (cf. Ezek 34:23) does not imply resurrection but rather the appointment of another, and pertained to David's seed that would be raised up (note the use of the verb קָוַם in 2 Sam 7:12—וַיִּקְוַם יְהוָה אֱתֵנְךָ דָּוִד אֶת־נְרִיעָךְ). Second, the "returning and seeking" (repentance) predicted in Hos 3:5 is unto "the LORD their God and David their king." The verse does not merely say that "David" will be their king, but that He is a joint recipient of the people's repentance (an honor much too high for literal David). Third, having David as king over the nation in the millennium would imply a sort of coregency with Christ, but Ezek 37:22 clearly stresses that "one king will be king for all of them" (cf. 34:23; 37:24). Recall Isa 9:6-7, which predicts that Messiah will sit on the Davidic throne and rule the government, not David and Messiah. Fourth, when we read such statements as "they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king" in Jer 30:9, we must be careful to understand these in light of contextual clarifications that reveal the true identity of this king. Thus, Jer 33:14-16 clarifies that this is speaking of the "righteous Branch of David" with whom the Davidic Covenant is fulfilled. Fifth, the shepherd imagery surrounding the reference to "My servant David" in Ezekiel 34 is very parallel with the shepherd imagery of Jeremiah 23. Yet in that latter context, the righteous ruler to come is not David himself, for Jer 23:5-6 states "I will raise up for David a righteous branch." Note that the regathering motif mentioned in Jer 23:3 and Ezek 34:13 confirms that the two passages pertain to the same time of fulfillment. Sixth, we have a similar reference to David in Isa 55:3-5, but in that context the Lord says, "I have made him a witness to the peoples (אֲמִיּוֹת), a leader and commander for the peoples (אֲמִיּוֹת)." The "peoples" is a reference to the Gentiles (note the parallelism with גֹּיִם in Isa 43:9), but it is certainly stretching things to see literal David as ruler not only over Israel but also the Gentile world. Clearly, "My servant David" and "David their king" are references to Messiah Jesus in view of the fact that the Covenant made with David is fulfilled in Jesus. Not surprisingly, even the Targum on Jer 30:9 reads, קְשִׁיחָא בְּרִי דְדָוִד.

in turn, close links with Ezek 37:18-28. In this latter passage, we find not only the promises of God making "a covenant of peace with them" (37:26) and that "My servant David will be king over them" (37:24), but also the promise "they will be My people, and I will be their God" (37:23; cf. 37:27)—a phrase strikingly similar to that uttered in Jer 31:34, the primary New Covenant passage!

This *contextual awareness* of the New Covenant in which Hosea 2:23 is couched explains the basis for the change of status that is being promised. The apostolic understanding that Gentiles were participants in the New Covenant helped them to see that the promise in Hosea of *status change* not only pertained to Jews participating in the New Covenant but to all who participated in the New Covenant—and hence to Gentiles. If the New Covenant passages like Jer 31:31-34 included Gentiles (though *seemingly* promised only to Israel), then the same hermeneutic applied to the Hosea promises.²¹ The fulfillment would include Gentiles, despite the fact that this was not overtly promised to them. What Hosea was clear about was that the fulfillment would come with those participating in the New Covenant. The passing of time would clarify that *the Gentiles also* participated in the New Covenant and hence in the promises through Hosea!

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has demonstrated that great care must be taken in trying to understand and explain the apostolic understanding of the Israel/church relationship. Several years ago, George Ladd argued, "I do not see how it is possible to avoid the conclusion that the New Testament applies to Old Testament

מְלִכְהוּן, "Messiah, Son of David, their king."

²¹ For further insight into Paul's understanding of New Covenant ministry in light of Jer 31:31-34 and 2 Cor 3, see Andrew G. Shead, "The Covenant and Pauline Hermeneutics," in *The Gospel to the Nations, Perspectives on Paul's Mission*, ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson, 33-49 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000).

prophecies to the New Testament church and in so doing identifies the church as spiritual Israel."²² Such a conclusion fails to do justice to the fullness of New Testament teaching and rightfully deserves to be rejected. There is a better way to understand the outworking of Old Testament national promises, and that is by seeing them in light of the dawning comprehension of the New Covenant in the life of the early church as Gentile inclusion was manifested. A study of the Apostle Paul's use of Hosea 1–2 in Romans 9:25-26 illuminates this very point.

For the Apostle Paul, the spiritual blessings promised Israel in the Old Testament were the entitlement of the "true Israel" of faith (the believing remnant), not unbelieving ethnic Israel in general. This remnant was to be seen as "vessels of mercy." Yet Gentiles chosen and called of God would also comprise the "vessels of mercy." In Romans 9:24-29, Paul gave scriptural support for both groups, drawing verses from Isaiah to demonstrate the inclusion of the Jewish remnant, and then verses from Hosea 1–2 to support the case of believing Gentiles. In their original context, the verses quoted from Hosea (2:23 and 1:10) revealed no implication of Gentile inclusion in their fulfillment. Paul's quotation of these verses, however, was not to deny a fulfillment with Israel, but rather to *bring out* the full scope of the fulfillment that would include both Jews and Gentiles. For this reason, he was not guilty of reinterpreting or spiritualizing Israel. The fulfillment simply was not exhausted by the believing remnant of Israel alone.

Paul's treatment of the Hosea passages must not be seen as a mere utilization for purposes of analogy or application of principle. The Gentiles were a legitimate phase of fulfillment for the Hosea passages, as 1 Peter 2:4-10 confirms. Believing Gentiles had now become "the people of God" . . . full and equal participants in the New Covenant. The unfolding events of the New Testament (coupled with the Spirit's revelation of the mystery of the church) allowed the Hosea passages to be

²² George Eldon Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 23.

seen in their proper (i.e., fullest) perspective. It was the New Covenant that made it possible for the Jewish remnant to become "the people of God." The very context of Hosea (particularly the mention of "covenant" in Hos 2:18) confirmed this. Since it was the New Covenant that made it possible for Gentiles to become part of the church, the "not my people" in the Hosea passages ultimately had Gentiles in view. They would become God's people, not by being incorporated into Israel as though they were Jewish proselytes, but in a more unique and honoring way—by being *added in* to the new entity of the church, the body of Christ, with whom the New Covenant was being fulfilled.

As God's people, both believing Israel and believing Gentiles today enjoy spiritual blessings that the New Covenant promised to Israel of old (though there are certain promises related to the complete fulfillment of the New Covenant that can only be realized with ethnic Israel). In this esteemed status, however, believing Gentiles are not Israel or some kind of *spiritual Israel*. Yet as New Covenant participants, they fully are "the people of God" . . . a status that unbelieving Jews outside the New Covenant cannot legitimately claim.