

# THE NEW COVENANT AND PAUL'S QUOTATIONS FROM HOSEA IN ROMANS 9:25–26

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**O**NE OF THE CRUCIAL ISSUES in biblical hermeneutics is the question of how to view 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)?<sup>1</sup> 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?

These questions are especially pertinent to Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. No verse states that Israel has forfeited her role and been permanently cast off by God. And no verse states that the church has replaced Israel. Yet one is still left with the challenge of explaining how certain Old Testament verses originally addressed to Israel are "used" in the New Testament in relation to Gentiles and the church. This article considers Paul's use of verses from Hosea 1–2 in Romans 9. How does his use of these verses contribute to understanding Israel and what it means to be "the people of God"?

## 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 this epistle, then explained how these truths relate to Israel as God's people. Since righteousness is not gained by keeping the Mo-

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<sup>1</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "An Assessment of 'Replacement Theology,'" *Mishkan* 10 (1989): 9–20.

saic Law (3:20) and since one can be declared righteous before God only by faith in Jesus Christ (vv. 28–30), what does this say about Israel, whom God told to keep the Law?

In 9:6 Paul wrote, “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 nothing to do with those who are Gentiles, as though “God’s Israel” were a people composed of Jews and Gentiles. Paul was clearly referring to the Jewish people. This relates to what he said earlier in 2:28–29. “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; nor 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” (Deut. 30:6) and partaking of the Holy Spirit—both being matters related to the New Covenant. Thus in Romans 9:6 Paul was 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.

This is confirmed by the way Paul consistently distinguished Israel from Gentiles throughout Romans 9–11. A clear case for this is found in 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 Paul clearly distinguished Israel from the believing Gentiles and even affirmed that Israel (as a whole) failed to attain to God’s righteousness.

In Romans 11 the apostle clarified this distinction between ethnic Israel in unbelief and the believing Israelite “remnant.” God’s covenant promises to Israel have not failed, because God will fulfill them with the believing remnant. Paul wrote in verse 1, “I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be.” Then in verse 5 he added, “In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice.” God will fulfill His promises of blessing with the believing remnant of Israel.

#### THE OLD TESTAMENT QUOTATIONS IN ROMANS 9:25–29

In Romans 9:25–29 Paul quoted twice from Hosea and twice from Isaiah. It is critical to understand the context in which these quotations stand. As already noted, in the earlier part of the chapter

Paul clarified that God's covenant promises need not be fulfilled with every single Israelite (vv. 6-7). Not all of Abraham's descendants are included. Paul discussed the doctrine of election in the context of clarifying that those who compose the believing remnant of Israel are chosen by God. This ensures that there will be a believing remnant, so that God's promises will not fail.

The fact that God elects a believing remnant in Israel raises a question about God's justice. Thus Paul, anticipating an imaginary objector, explained that God's election of the believing remnant is not unjust because it is based on the mercy of God, not on merit. What makes the apostle's argument so striking, however, is that he extended this concept to Gentiles, stating that God has chosen some from both Gentiles and Jews to be objects of His mercy. His flow of thought could be summarized this way: (a) Because God is sovereign, no one has a right to question His method by which some are chosen for salvation (vv. 19-21). (b) Whoever is chosen for salvation (whether Jew or Gentile) is chosen strictly on the basis of God's mercy (vv. 22-24).

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

Those who have been chosen by God are "vessels of mercy" (v. 23). And they are not limited to individuals of Jewish descent: "even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles" (v. 25). Then in verses 25-29 Paul inserted four quotations from the Old Testament. He summarized the subject in this way: "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" (vv. 30-31).

The Old Testament quotations are bracketed by verses 22-24 and verses 30-31. When these verses are compared, it becomes apparent that the Old Testament quotations sandwiched between serve the purpose of proving that God's mercy has been extended *both* to a remnant of Israel and to Gentiles. The words "What shall we say then?" which introduce verse 30, obviously introduce a conclusion Paul had reached. Since verse 24 introduces the inclusion of Gentiles in God's mercy and verses 30-31 state that believing Gentiles attained righteousness, one can safely infer that in these

Old Testament quotations Paul was offering proof for the inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles in God's mercy.<sup>2</sup>

In verses 27–29 Paul quoted from Isaiah 10:22–23 and 1:9. Paul included these quotations to support his case that God has chosen “vessels of mercy” from ethnic Israel, and this is confirmed by the way he introduced the verses: “Isaiah cries out concerning Israel.” Since these two quotations from Isaiah support the case of a believing remnant of Israel being included in God's mercy, one could expect to find support for the case of Gentile inclusion in one or both of the other two quotations found in Romans 9:25–26. In these verses Paul quoted from Hosea 2:23 first and then from 1:10. “I will call those who were not My people, ‘My people,’ and her who was not beloved, ‘Beloved’ . . . 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.”

Though Paul did not introduce the two quotations from Hosea with the words “Now concerning the Gentiles,” it seems clear that Paul was citing these verses to establish the point that God's “vessels of mercy” include Gentiles.<sup>3</sup>

Thus Paul used 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. However, the apostle's use of Hosea raises significant questions especially at the hermeneutical level. Was Paul using these verses from Hosea in the same way (i.e., with the same meaning) that the prophet himself did? More pointedly, was Paul *violating* the meaning of these verses by offering them as proof of Gentiles being made “My people”?

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<sup>2</sup> Any attempt to argue that the Hosea quotations were used by Paul in Romans to argue for the inclusion of all ethnic Israelites must certainly be rejected. This position, though rare, is presented 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.

<sup>3</sup> W. Edward Glenny, “The ‘People of God’ in Romans 9:25–26,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (January–March 1995): 42–59. Douglas J. Moo draws the same conclusion that Paul's Old Testament support for the calling of Gentiles must be drawn from Hosea (*The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 611). For a dissenting position, however, see David L. Turner, “The Continuity of Scripture and Eschatology: Key Hermeneutical Issues,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (fall 1985): 275–87. Following Battle's earlier work, Turner contends that in Romans 9:25–26 Paul was thinking not of the church but “of the present unbelief and future restoration of the nation of Israel” (*ibid.*, 281).

## THE HOSEA QUOTATIONS IN THEIR ORIGINAL CONTEXT

Hosea 2:23 reads, “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 reads, “I will call those who were not My people, ‘My People,’ and her who was not beloved, ‘Beloved.’”

Although at first glance these verses may seem different, this is only an illusion created by the fact that Paul quoted from a Greek rendering of Hosea and the fact that he reversed the order of the clauses (perhaps to stress the “My people” aspect of the promise and God’s “call” to them).<sup>4</sup> In Hosea two issues are prominent: God’s exercise of “compassion” and Israel’s “My people” status. Both of these are vitally related also to Hosea 1:10 in its immediate context, that is, in 1:1–2:1a. In 1:6, for instance, God used the symbolic name of Hosea’s child Lo-ruhamah (לֹא רַחֲמָה, “no compassion”) to announce that His “compassion” was 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 in the eighth century B.C., culminating with the exile in 722 B.C. The name of Hosea’s third child Lo-ammi (לֹא אַמִּי, “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.”

In Romans 9:26 Paul did not quote all of Hosea 1:10. 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 contain a striking allusion to what God had promised to Abraham centuries earlier in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 22:17; 32:12; cf. 13:15–16). The point of Hosea 1:10 is to affirm that although the northern kingdom in Hosea’s day was being cut off from God’s covenant favor, God was still bound to His promises made to the nation under the Abrahamic Covenant. Furthermore this truth remained the basis for God again extending

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<sup>4</sup> Moo notes that Paul also switched Hosea’s “I will say” to “I will call,” probably in view of Romans 9:24. “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” (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 612). (The word “call” also occurs at the end of verse 26.) This is vital to the argument, for God’s call logically follows His act of predestination.

His compassion in the future to the nation Israel.<sup>5</sup> This is established in Hosea 1:10b, the portion quoted by Paul. “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.’” Paul wrote in 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 Hosea’s day a portion of Abraham’s descendants were being disavowed, removed from covenant privilege. But sometime in the future their status will change, and they will go from being “not My people” to being “My people.” This concept of “My people” harked back to the nation’s early history, and especially to the agreement that was reached at Mount 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” (Exod. 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).

Seen in 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 did Hosea imply that the fulfillment of these promises would be with Gentiles. Some writers, however, say that Paul’s quotations show that the church is the “new Israel,”

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<sup>5</sup> The timing for the fulfillment of these promises to the nation is hinted at in Hosea 1:11 when the prophet declared, “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 37:21–24. God declared that He will gather them from the nations where they had been dispersed and will bring them back to the land (v. 21). Then there will be a reunion of the nation when “one king will be king for all of them,” hence, “one leader” (v. 22). God will cleanse them (v. 23) with the result that once again “they will be My people, and I will be their God.” Then verse 24 declares that “My servant David will be king over them” (a reference to Messiah). Hosea 3:5 also helps clarify 1:11. “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 Deuteronomy 4:25–31, which states that the nation will return to the LORD after being “in distress” [v. 30]—an early anticipation of her salvation from future tribulation—a theme that is amplified throughout the Old Testament.) For more on “David their king” as a reference to the Messiah see notes 7 and 20.

that is, that the church replaces Israel.<sup>6</sup> However, that theological position has several weaknesses. In Romans 9–11, the most extended treatment of “Israel” in the New Testament, Paul clearly distinguished Israel from the church, as mentioned earlier. Furthermore many Old Testament predictions for Israel simply cannot legitimately be said to find fulfillment in the church—passages such as the promise that Israel will have to go through the “time of Jacob’s distress” (Jer. 30:7) when God said, “I will chasten you justly, and will by no means leave you unpunished” (v. 11).<sup>7</sup> And God predicted that “all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it,” that is, against Jerusalem (Zech. 12:3), to be followed by the Lord’s personal return to deliver her (14:1–9).

#### CLARIFICATIONS REGARDING THE FULFILLMENT OF HOSEA 1–2

Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 clearly refer to Israel. And yet in Romans 9:25–26 Paul quoted those verses and applied them to Gentile believers of the church. This is not to say, however, that he misused Hosea or that he spiritualized these verses. It must be emphasized that Paul did not deny that the Hosea verses pertained to Israel. Paul knew and understood the meaning of these verses in their original context. He understood that God’s mercy extended to a remnant within Israel, because the verses that he quoted in Romans 9:27–29 from Isaiah affirm this. Hence Paul was not reinterpreting the Hosea verses. *His point in Romans 9 was not to deny a fulfillment with Israel but only to affirm a fulfillment also with Gentiles.* However, this raises the question, How can the Hosea verses *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 arguing not for the fulfillment of the verses with Gentiles but for the *application of a principle* to Gentiles.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For example Moo writes, “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” (ibid., 613).

<sup>7</sup> These verses in Jeremiah pertain to more than the Babylonian Captivity. Jeremiah declared not only that Israel would return to the land (Jer. 30:10) but also that “they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king” (v. 9). The words “David their king” refer to the Messiah to come from David’s seed (cf. 23:5–6; 33:15), and thus these words point to the messianic age of the future for their fulfillment.

<sup>8</sup> Robert B. Chisholm Jr., “Hosea,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 1386; and John A. Witmer, “Romans,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testa-*

However, verses 25–26 affirm that the conversion of Gentiles is a *direct fulfillment* of Hosea's prophecy (though not the complete fulfillment).

Paul was not alone in recognizing the fulfillment of this prophecy. Peter wrote that the church is a *spiritual temple* made up of living stones (1 Pet. 2:5). In contrast to those who stumbled because they were disobedient to the word (a reference to unbelieving Israel; v. 8), those who believe “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 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” (vv. 9–10).

Peter wrote that his audience (which surely included Gentiles) were “the people of God”—using words from Exodus 19:5–6 and Hosea 2:23. Peter was not merely applying a principle to his readers; he saw his readers as a *partial fulfillment* of these Old Testament passages.<sup>9</sup> This is not to say, however, that he regarded these verses as having complete fulfillment with Gentiles because Israel had forfeited her place of privilege before God. Instead Peter spoke of fulfillment, not merely application or analogy. So, while these Old Testament verses clearly pertained to Israel—to those physically descended from Abraham—the promise need not be fulfilled 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.

#### THE HERMENEUTICAL EXPLANATION

The Hosea promises quoted by Paul in Romans 9 will find their fulfillment with Israel, that is, with “true Israel” (a believing remnant), but these promises are not exhausted by Israel. God in-

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*ment*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983), 478–79. S. Lewis Johnson 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” (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 613).

<sup>9</sup> 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: Zondervan, 1992), 156–87.



tended the fulfillment of the promises in Hosea 1–2 to be more than was apparent at the time of Hosea's initial prophecy, and Gentiles would become part of the divinely intended fulfillment. Paul was not operating by some new theological dictum whereby Israel no longer meant Israel. Instead 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?

This "more complete understanding" of Hosea was not only incapable of recognition at the time of its original utterance (even by Hosea himself), but was probably not even recognized initially by the early church.<sup>10</sup> This understanding came to light only in the course of early first-century church history as a result of several converging matters.

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 understanding, they did not comprehend 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 the events recorded in Acts 10–11 the Holy Spirit revealed the "mystery" of the church to Paul (and possibly other apostles as well). Ephesians 3:3 states, "by revelation [*ἀποκάλυψιν*] there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief." Paul did not determine this by studying Scripture; the Holy Spirit had to make it known to him.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See the discussion about "heightening" in Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1991), 267–69. He points out that New Testament writers enlarged or extended statements from Old Testament passages so as to fill them with more meaning (but not contradictory meaning). On pages 274–75 he suggests the expression "references plenior" (a text having a single meaning, but with related implications).

<sup>11</sup> 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 in A.D. 60–62. Probably Paul had received this revelation before then, but how much earlier is difficult to say. In light of statements made in 1 Corinthians about *Spirit baptism* "into one body," Paul probably had received the revelation about the mystery of the church before he wrote 1 Corinthians, which may be dated approximately A.D. 54–55, three or four years before he wrote Romans (David K. Lowery, "1 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, 505). Paul's earliest writing, Galatians (ca. A.D. 49, just before 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 (v. 14). Thus Paul's understanding of the relationship of the church to Israel could predate the writing of Galatians (but see the following

An interesting question is whether this truth was even understood in the church before the Jerusalem Council of A.D. 49 (Acts 15). In light of the intense debate over the role of Gentiles in God's salvation, one would think that the truths stated 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 Acts 15 does not reflect this, despite the fact that the leaders there asserted, "we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are" (v. 11).

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 several key developments would have at least paved the way for Paul's insights into Hosea, and these are related to the progressive understanding about the New Covenant itself.<sup>12</sup>

Although the 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 later. "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 that the prophesied New Covenant of the Old Testament had arrived and was in operation (though not completely fulfilled).<sup>13</sup> They were no longer participants in the Old Covenant with its 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.<sup>14</sup> In Ezekiel 36:24–28

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comments on the Jerusalem Council).

<sup>12</sup> On the church and its relationship to the New Covenant see Rodney J. Decker, "The Church's Relationship to the New Covenant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (July–September 1995): 290–305.

<sup>13</sup> How and with whom the New Covenant promises find fulfillment is much debated, and even within dispensationalism there are 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 (spring 1999): 64–98. His discussion concerning the question of the church's participation in the New Covenant is stimulating, though the present writer does not agree with Daniels's 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" (ibid., 92). For Daniels the church benefits from the New Covenant spiritual blessings because of her role as priests, not because the New Covenant is fulfilled with her (ibid., 90).

<sup>14</sup> 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

the pouring out of the Holy Spirit was promised to the nation. That this was a New Covenant matter is attested by the words, “so you will be My people, and I will be your God” (v. 28)—a promise found precisely in the more formal announcement of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:33 (cf. 30:22; 31:1). Whereas Jeremiah stressed the forgiveness of sin (“for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more,” 31:34), Ezekiel spoke of 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). From an Old Testament perspective the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 would have been a logical sequence to the Calvary event (whereby Christ’s blood made possible forgiveness of sin).

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).<sup>15</sup> The events of Acts 10–11 would have significantly escalated their understanding, and those who witnessed this stood amazed at what was happening. “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers [Jewish Christians] who came 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” (10:44–46).

In the following days 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 (v. 43), but more significantly, that God also intended the Gentile believers to be full participants in 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 the impression that Gentiles were to be included. Piecing together all these factors (beginning

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Press of America, 1993), 7–14, 27–45, 251–70. See also Paul R. Thorsell, “The Spirit in the Present Age: Preliminary Fulfillment of the Predicted New Covenant according to Paul,” *Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 (1998): 397–413.

<sup>15</sup> Of course not all aspects of the New Covenant promises and expectations are realized in the church. The promises and expectations of the Abrahamic Covenant are being 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.

with Jesus' announcement of the New Covenant), it was logical to conclude that if the New Covenant was underway and Gentiles were receiving the Holy Spirit in the same way believing Jews received Him, then Gentiles must be participating in the New Covenant.<sup>16</sup>

This New Covenant awareness would have set the stage for a fresh understanding of the promises in Hosea 1–2. In those two chapters the stress is on a “change of status”—a change from being “not My people” to being “My people” (or in the words of 1:10, a change from “not My people” to being “sons of the living God”). What makes this change of status possible? The New Covenant. As mentioned, in the two most prominent Old Testament passages that announce the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34 and Ezek. 36:24–28), the recipients of the New Covenant are said to be “My people.” “I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jer. 31:33; cf. Ezek. 36:28).

A closer examination of the context of Hosea 2:23 reveals that the New Covenant is in view.<sup>17</sup> Verse 18 states, “In that day I will also make a covenant for them.” Although this verse says “a covenant,” not “new covenant,” the New Covenant is undoubtedly in

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<sup>16</sup> 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. A careful reading of Jeremiah 30–31 and Ezekiel 36–37 (both of which are imbued with New Covenant thought) finds many prophetic details that can be fulfilled only with ethnic Israel in conjunction with 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” (v. 11)—an event slated for “the latter days” (v. 24). In the midst of this experience the nation will plead with God and confess her sinfulness (31:18–19), and as a result the Lord will save (i.e., deliver) her from it (30:7). Following this national deliverance the Lord will regather Israel back to the land originally promised to Abraham (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” (37:25; cf. 36:28). Also agricultural blessings are included (36:29–30, 33–35). And the Lord will cleanse Israel of all her spiritual unfaithfulness (vv. 25, 29, 33; 37:23), and the surviving remnant will enjoy His blessings (Jer. 31:12).

<sup>17</sup> For a 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 metaphors throughout the book, including the marriage metaphor in Hosea 2:2–23. “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 (yā) YHVH must exclaim ‘ist, ‘my loving, beloved husband.’ It is a new covenant in kind much more than in time” (ibid., 229).

view.<sup>18</sup> This is supported by the words of verse 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 Jeremiah 31:34: “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 verses 14–23 (a salvation-oracle depicting future restoration) have with Ezekiel 34:20–31 and God’s promise in that context of “a covenant of peace” (v. 25) attended by blessings and security.<sup>19</sup> Ezekiel 34:23–24 also foretells that “My servant David” (who is the Messiah) will be shepherd and prince over the people.<sup>20</sup> This Ezekiel

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18 Leon J. 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” (“Hosea,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 7 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985], 178–80). Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman offer no help on identifying the covenant (*Hosea*, Anchor Bible [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980], 281). Hans Walter Wolff, on the other hand, is quite explicit in noting that the New Covenant is in view in Hosea 2:18. “Regarding the content, here we have the first reference to a ‘new covenant’ of the endtime (cf. Jer. 31:31)” (*Hosea*, Hermenia, trans. Gary Stensell [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974], 51; see also 55).

19 The promise in Hosea 2:18, “I will make them lie down in safety [לְבִטָּח]” is similar to the promise in Ezekiel 34:28 (“but they will live securely [וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ לְבִטָּח] and no one will make them afraid”). Other prominent connections involve agricultural blessings and the removal of armies from the land (foreign invaders are depicted as “beasts” in verses 25 and 28; cf. Lev 26:6).

20 The prophetic anticipation of “My servant David” ruling over the nation at the time of the final fulfillment of the New Covenant with Israel is observed not only in Ezekiel 34:23–24 but also in 37:24–25, and similarly (“David their king”) in Jeremiah 30:9 and Hosea 3:5. Some have taken these promises to mean that in the millennium David himself will rule in Jerusalem with Christ as prince over Israel (John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* [Wheaton, IL: SP, 1990], 628; and Charles H. Dyer, “Jeremiah,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, 1168; and idem, “Ezekiel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, 1295).

Others (including many dispensationalists) see these references as pertaining not to David but to David’s greater Son, the Messiah. These authors include H. A. Ironside, *Lamentations and Jeremiah* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Bros., 1906), 149; Charles L. Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody, 1969), 198, 216; John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1969), 222–23; R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 134; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 557; Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 205; Leon J. Wood, “Hosea,” 183; Ralph H. Alexander, “Ezekiel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 913–14, 927–28; Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Interpreting the*

passage, in turn, has close links with Ezekiel 37:18–28, in which God promised (a) to make “a covenant of peace” with Israel (v. 26), and (b) that “My servant David will be king over them” (v. 24), and also (c) that “they will be My people, and I will be their God” (v. 23; cf. v. 27), a clause similar to the words in Jeremiah 31:33–34.

The apostolic understanding that Gentiles were participants in the New Covenant helped the apostles see that the promise in Hosea of *status change* pertained not only to Jews in the New Covenant but to *all* who participated in the New Covenant—and hence also to Gentiles. If the New Covenant passages like Jeremiah 31:31–34 included Gentiles (though seemingly promised only to Israel), then the same hermeneutic applied to the Hosea promises.<sup>21</sup> Gentiles would be included in the fulfillment of the New

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*Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 29; Lamar E. Cooper Sr., *Ezekiel*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 302, 327; and Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 297–301, 418.

Several points may be noted in support of David's name being applied to Messiah (which would not have been unusual, in light of the fact that the promises were made to David and were to be fulfilled in his seed according to the Davidic Covenant of 2 Sam. 7). First, 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, as Feinberg has pointed out (*The Prophecy of Ezekiel*, 198). No introductory word concerning resurrection is mentioned with any of the passages in question. The phrase “I will raise up for them” (אָקִים לָהֶם) in Jeremiah 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 קָם in 2 Sam. 7:12—וְהָקִמֹתִי אֶחָדָם מֵאֶחָדֵיכֶם).

Second, having David as king or prince over the nation in the millennium would imply a sort of coregency with Christ, but Ezekiel 37:22 clearly states that “one king will be king for all of them” (cf. v. 24; 34:23).

Third, Isaiah 9:6–7 predicts that Messiah, not Messiah and David, will sit on David's throne and rule the world.

Fourth, the shepherd imagery in the reference to “My servant David” in Ezekiel 34:22–24 parallels the shepherd imagery of Jeremiah 23:1–4. Yet in the latter context the righteous ruler to come is not David himself, for Jeremiah 23:5 states, “I will raise up *for David* a righteous Branch” (italics added). Israel's regathering mentioned in Jeremiah 23:3 and Ezekiel 34:13 confirms that the two passages pertain to the same time of fulfillment.

Fifth, Isaiah 55:3 refers to God's “everlasting covenant” with Israel through David, and in verse 4 the Lord said, “I have made him a witness to the peoples (אֲמִתִּים), a leader and commander for the peoples (אֲמִתִּים).” The word “peoples” refers to the Gentiles (this parallels נַגִּים in 43:9), but it would be stretching the point to see David as ruler not only over Israel but also over the Gentile world.

Thus “My servant David” and “David their king” seem to be references to the Messiah in view of the fact that the covenant made with David is fulfilled in Jesus. Not surprisingly even the Targum on Jeremiah 30:9 reads, בֶּרֶךְ דָּוִד מְלִכְדָּוִן (“Messiah, Son of David, their king”).

<sup>21</sup> For further insight into Paul's understanding of New Covenant ministry in light of Jeremiah 31:31–34 and 2 Corinthians 3 see Andrew G. Shead, “The Covenant and Pauline Hermeneutics,” in *The Gospel to the Nations, Perspectives on Paul's Mis-*

Covenant, even though it 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 clarified that the Gentiles also would participate in the New Covenant and hence in the promises given through Hosea!

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has demonstrated that care must be taken in trying to understand and explain the apostolic understanding of the relationship of Israel and the church. Ladd argued, "I do not see how it is possible to avoid the conclusion that the New Testament applies Old Testament prophecies to the New Testament church and in so doing identifies the church as spiritual Israel."<sup>22</sup> Such a conclusion, however, fails to do justice to the New Testament. A better way of understanding the outworking of Old Testament national promises is to see them in light of the dawning comprehension of the New Covenant in the life of the early church as Gentiles were included. A study of Paul's use of Hosea 1–2 in Romans 9:25–26 illumines this very point.

The blessings promised to Israel in the Old Testament were for 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 be included as "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 inclusion of the Gentiles was a legitimate phase of fulfillment for the Hosea passages, as 1 Peter 2:4–10 confirms. Believing Gen-

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tion, ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 33–49.

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

tiles 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 Holy Spirit’s revelation of the mystery of the church) allowed the Hosea passages to be seen in their fullest perspective. It was the New Covenant that made it possible for the Jewish remnant to become “the people of God.” The context of Hosea (particularly the mention of a “covenant” in Hosea 2:18) confirms 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* to the new entity of the church, the body of Christ, with whom the New Covenant was being partially fulfilled.

As God’s people, both believing Israel and believing Gentiles today (as members of the church, the body of Christ) enjoy *spiritual* blessings that the New Covenant promised to Israel of old—though there are certain physical and geographical promises related to the complete fulfillment of the New Covenant that can be realized only with the believing remnant of 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.