PAUL'S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN ROMANS 9:25-26

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A number of premillennial writers are now agreeing with amillennialists that a literal interpretation of OT prophecies concerning Israel is not justified. They claim that the NT interprets these prophecies in a "spiritualized" sense, applying them to the present church, and conclude that the OT provides no proof of a future national conversion of Israel or of a future millennial kingdom. The quotations of Hosea in Rom 9:25-26 are cited as a primary example. Most who hold to the literal interpretation of prophecy assume that Paul quotes Hosea by way of analogy only, without denying a future fulfilment for Israel; others believe that Paul quotes Hosea literally and has specifically in mind Israel's present unbelief and future conversion. The author prefers the second alternative and sees evidence for this interpretation not only in the context of Hosea, but also in the context of Romans 9. The background and contexts of the other OT passages cited in Romans 9 confirm the suggested interpretation. It is concluded that the literal interpretation of OT prophecy not only agrees with Paul's normal hermeneutics but helps greatly in the exegesis of this particular passage.

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TODAY it is recognized more than ever that one's theology as a whole is closely related to one's hermeneutics. This fact especially comes to the fore in the study of eschatology. For decades the dictum has held true that amillennialism requires an allegorical or "spiritual" interpretation of biblical prophecy (especially in the OT), while premillennialism springs from a more literal interpretation of those prophecies.

Therefore, it comes as a surprise that a premillennial writer would favor a spiritualized interpretation of OT prophecy. Yet, several premillennialists have done this, the most prominent being George Eldon Ladd of Fuller Theological Seminary. In an interesting

book on the millennium, in which four theologians debate each other,[1] Ladd declares himself to be a premillennialist, but on the basis of only two NT passages, Rev 20:1-6, and to a lesser extent, 1 Cor 15:23-26.[2] Similarly, his belief in the future national conversion of Israel is founded on a single NT passage, Rom 11:26.[3] To support his eschatology Ladd refuses to use the scores of OT passages dealing with the messianic kingdom and its blessings. He believes that a literal interpretation of many of these passages may be possible, but that it is not required; he claims that in several cases the NT itself interprets OT prophecies in a nonliteral or "spiritualizing" sense. Ladd concludes that the OT cannot be used confidently to describe the future millennial kingdom, or even to prove its existence:[4]

> The fact is that the New Testament frequently interprets Old Testament prophecies in a way *not suggested by the Old Testament context.*
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> This clearly establishes the principle that the "literal hermeneutic" does not work.
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> The Old Testament did not clearly foresee how its own prophecies were to be fulfilled. They were fulfilled in ways quite unforeseen by the Old Testament itself and unexpected by the Jews. With regard to the first coming of Christ, *the Old Testament is interpreted by the New Testament.* . . . A nondispensational eschatology forms its theology from the explicit teaching of the New Testament. It confesses that it cannot be sure how the Old Testament prophecies of the end are to be fulfilled.[5]

THE ARGUMENT SURROUNDING ROM 9:25-26

To demonstrate that the NT handles the OT in a nonliteral fashion, Ladd cites four primary examples: Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:15; Isa 53:4, 7-8 in Matt 8:17 and Acts 8:32-33; Hos 2:23 and 1:10 in Rom 9:25-26; and Jer 31:31-34 in Heb 8:8-12.[6] Of these four, Ladd singles

[1] *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (ed. Robert G. Clouse; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977); the four scholars are G. E. Ladd (historic premillennialism), H. A. Hoyt (dispensational premillennialism), L. Boettner (postmillennialism), and A. A. Hoekema (amillennialism).

[2] Ibid., 32-39.

[3] Ibid., 27-29.

[4] Ibid., 20-27.

[5] Ibid., 20, 23, 27; italics his. It should be noted that many nondispensational writers disagree with Ladd's position and seek to follow a grammatical-historical approach to both the OT and the NT.

[6] Ibid., 20-27. Ladd could have cited also Amos 9:11-12, quoted in Acts 15:16-17, a key passage for those arguing for "spiritualized" exegesis; elsewhere he does apply it to the present age, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 355. For a more thorough discussion of this passage from the amillennial

out Rom 9:25-26 as "a most vivid illustration of this principle."[7] In this passage Paul quotes the OT: "Even as it says in Hosea, 'I will call them my people who were not my people, and her beloved who was not beloved; and it will be in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," there they will be called sons of the living God.'"

The OT verses quoted by Paul, Hos 2:23 and 1:10, predict the future restoration of Israel to God's favor and blessing after a period of estrangement and judgment caused by Israel's unbelief. Nearly all commentators recognize that Hosea has literal, national Israel in view—particularly, the ten northern tribes. Furthermore, the predicted blessings seem to fit perfectly with the future millennium. Hosea emphasizes Israel's future repentance and reinstatement as God's people, the objects of his mercy.

But in Rom 9:25-26 Paul quotes these verses in a surprising manner. V 24 speaks of "us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles," indicating Christians of his day. Paul then continues, "as also it says in Hosea," and quotes these verses. Many believe that here he equates the Christian church with the promised restoration of Israel, employing a "spiritualizing" interpretation of Hosea's prophecy. Such is Ladd's conclusion:

> Paul deliberately takes these two prophecies about the future of Israel and applies them to the church. The church, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, has become the people of God. The prophecies of Hosea are fulfilled in the Christian church. If this is a "spiritualizing hermeneutic" so be it. . . . It is clearly what the New Testament does to the Old Testament prophecies.

Obviously, if Ladd's exegesis is correct, those who hold to a consistent grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture must modify their position. On the other hand, the exegesis of the Romans passage itself must stand careful scrutiny, especially since issues of hermeneutics and theology are involved. This writer believes that a careful examination of both passages in their related contexts will reveal a basic underlying unity and that a consistent literal interpretation of Hosea's prophecy is the key to understanding Paul's meaning in Romans 9.

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viewpoint, see O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955) 145-50, and more recently, A. A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 209-10. For an excellent treatment favoring literal exegesis, see A. A. MacRae, "The Scientific Approach to the OT," *BSac* 110 (1953) 313-16.

[7]This passage is discussed by Ladd, *Meaning of the Millennium*, 23-24.

VARIOUS APPROACHES TO ROM 9:25-26

Commentators and theologians who seriously discuss this passage tend to hold one of three opinions: (1) Paul actually changes Hosea's meaning in its OT context to make the prophecy refer directly and exclusively to his own times, (2) Paul only uses Hosea's prophecy as an example or analogy, applying its principle to his own times, or (3) Paul employs Hosea's prophecy literally, with the same meaning as that evident in the OT context. Within each approach there are several variations. Each of these approaches will be summarized below.

Changing Hosea's meaning

Many look at the seeming discrepancy between Hosea and Paul, "take the bull by the horns," and declare that Paul simply changed or "transformed" Hosea's prophecy. On the critical side, commentators often accuse Paul of misusing the OT for his own ends. For example, C. H. Dodd has written:

> The verses which follow are extremely difficult in the Greek. . . . When Paul, normally a clear thinker, becomes obscure, it usually means that he is embarrassed by the position he has taken up. It is surely so here. . . . It is rather strange that Paul has not observed that this prophecy referred to Israel, rejected for its sins, but destined to be restored: strange because it would have fitted so admirably the doctrine of the restoration of Israel which he is to expound in chap. xi. But, if the particular prophecy is ill-chosen, it is certainly true that the prophets did declare the calling of the Gentiles.[8]

Likewise Ernst Käsemann sees Paul disregarding the original sense of Hosea:

> As is his custom Paul understands the sayings as eschatologically oriented oracles without considering their original sense. . . . With great audacity he takes the promises to Israel and relates them to the Gentile-Christians.[9]

Opposed to this cavalier treatment of Pauline exegesis, many conservative writers still feel that Paul basically transforms or "deepens" Hosea's meaning to refer to the church of his day. Although, as mentioned above, G. E. Ladd takes this approach, it is

[8]C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans* (MNTC; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932) 159-60.

[9]E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. from 4th Ger. ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 274.

found most frequently among postmillennialists or amillennialists, who naturally favor a more "spiritualizing" hermeneutic. H. N. Ridderbos, for example, calls this passage "a transition in interpretation."[10]

A number of exegetical points in Romans 9-11 lend support to this approach; the following seem to be the most important:

1) The Gentiles are mentioned immediately before and after Paul's quotations (vv 24, 30).

2) The δέ at the beginning of v 27 could well contrast the status of Jews in v 27 with that of Gentiles in vv 25-26.

3) Peter paraphrases Hos 2:23, referring it to his Christian readers (1 Pet 2:10).[11]

4) The "vessels of wrath" of v 22 seem to be unbelieving Jews, while the "vessels of mercy" of v 23 are identified as believing Jews and Gentiles. Such a contrast is carried out in Rom 9:30-10:4.

5) The structure citing blessings on the "non-people" in vv 25-26, followed by judgment against Israel in vv 27-29, is parallel to the preference for the "non-nation" in 10:19-20, followed by the judgment against Israel in 10:21. The "non-nation" in 10:19 refers to Gentiles.

6) Paul, by the term "jealousy" in 10:19 and 11:11, 14, links his own ministry in the church to the eschatological promises made to Israel. In fact, Paul's whole line of argument from the OT in Romans 9-11 seems to presuppose its relevance for his own day.

Taken together, these arguments give a powerful impetus to many theologians, who conclude that Paul in some way changes the meaning of Hosea's prophecy from that which is apparent in its original context. Of course, the major drawback of this viewpoint is its conclusion regarding hermeneutics: while the NT is to be interpreted (more or less) literally, the OT is not. Many amillennialists expand this principle to all OT prophecy and thereby deny any future fulfilment of these prophecies for the nation of Israel.

An argument from analogy

Many commentators, desiring to maintain the integrity of Hosea's meaning, and yet convinced that Paul is speaking of Gentiles, see in this passage an application of Hosea's prophecy, but not its total fulfilment. Charles Hodge expresses this view well:

[10]H. Ridderbos, *Paul, An Outline of His Theology*, trans. J. R. de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 340.

[11]On the other hand, Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 274, contrasts Rom 9:25 with *Jub* 2:19, "Behold, I will separate unto Myself a people from among all the peoples, . . . and I will sanctify them unto Myself as My people, and will bless

> The difficulty with regard to this passage is, that in Hosea it evidently has reference not to the heathen, but to the ten tribes. Whereas, Paul refers it to the Gentiles. . . . This difficulty is sometimes gotten over by giving a different view of the apostle's object in the citation, and making it refer to the restoration of the Jews. But this interpretation is obviously at variance with the context. It is more satisfactory to say, that the ten tribes were in a heathenish state, relapsed into idolatry, and, therefore, what was said of them, is of course applicable to others in like circumstances, or of like character. . . . This method of interpreting and applying Scripture is both common and correct. A general truth, stated in reference to a particular class of persons, is to be considered as intended to apply to all those whose character and circumstances are the same, though the form or words of the original enunciation may not be applicable to all embraced within the scope of the general sentiment.[12]

Likewise, Sanday and Headlam say that "St. Paul applies the principle which underlies these words, that God can take into His covenant those who were previously cut off from it, to the calling of the Gentiles."[13] This approach is followed by Herman A. Hoyt in his reply to Ladd's argument:

> In passage after passage Ladd insists that the New Testament is interpreting the Old when the New Testament is simply applying a principle found in the Old Testament (Hos. 11:1 with Mt. 2:15; Hos. 1:10; 2:23 with Rom. 9:24-26). Rushing to the conclusion that these references identify the church and Israel as the same body of the saved is wholly gratuitous. . . . It makes such application merely for the purpose of explaining something that is true of both.[14]

This approach to Rom 9:25-26 certainly has its advantages. It strives to do justice to Hosea's prophecy in its context, and it also recognizes the apparent force of the context in Romans concerning the conversion of Gentiles. In addition, the introductory formula, "even as (ὡς) it says in Hosea," fits well with an illustration or analogy and does not demand that it be the strict fulfilment of the prophecy.

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them; . . . and they shall be My people and I will be their God." The Jubilees passage refers exclusively to national Israel (cf. v 31). R. H. Charles dates this work between 109 and 105 B.C., *APOT* (1913) 2, 6.

[12]C. Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (rev. ed., 1886; reprinted; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950) 326-27.

[13]W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902) 264; similarly, J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 38.

[14]*Meaning of the Millennium*, 42-43.

In spite of its attraction, however, the argument for analogy has some drawbacks. For one thing, Paul normally interprets OT prophecies literally, as will be discussed later in this article. The few examples of his analogical use of scripture normally come from non-predictive portions (as Ps 19:4 in Rom 10:18, or Deut 25:4 in 1 Tim 5:18).

There remains a greater difficulty with this interpretation. The analogy between the ten tribes and the Gentiles breaks down at a critical point. Hodge mentioned that an analogy is appropriate for "all those whose character and circumstances are the same." Certainly one could identify the "character" of the idolatrous ten tribes with that of the Gentiles. Paul no doubt was amazed by God's mercy revealed both in God's promises for adulterous Israel and in his saving the heathen. But the "circumstances" of the two groups are quite different. Romans 1-2 describes the Gentiles' relation to God as founded upon creation and conscience, whereas Romans 2-3 describes the Jews' relation to God as also one of promise and covenant. The covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have placed even the unbelieving Jews in a unique position in the world (cf. Rom 11:24). It is because of these covenants that the OT predicts Israel's restoration (e.g., Lev 26:40-45; Deut 4:29-31). And Paul himself in Romans 9-11 stresses that this restoration stems from God's special mercy and covenant-faithfulness to Israel (Rom 9:4-6; 11:1-2, 11, 24, 28-29). In this major respect Paul does not view the present salvation of Gentiles as analogous to the promised future salvation of national Israel.

Identity of meaning

As quoted above, Charles Hodge has said, "This difficulty is sometimes gotten over by giving a different view of the apostle's object in the citation, and making it refer to the restoration of the Jews." Actually, very few commentators have proposed this solution; as Hodge went on to say, "This interpretation is obviously at variance with the context." Nevertheless, one who has ventured this approach is Alva J. McClain, who says in his popular commentary:

> A lot of folks think that this passage refers to the Gentiles. It does not. They think Paul made a mistake and quoted from the Old Testament something that belonged to Jews and applied it to the Gentiles. He is talking about Israel. "I will call her my people which was not my people." God cast Israel off and then picked her up in mercy.[15]

[15]A. J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace* (ed. H. A. Hoyt; Chicago: Moody, 1973) 183.

Unfortunately, the brief and popular style of McClain's book prevents a clarification and defense of this statement. Its major difficulty, as Hodge has noted, is the context in Romans 9, which seems to be speaking about the present, largely Gentile church. Yet this approach has the distinct asset of taking Hosea's prophecy at face value and maintaining complete harmony between Hosea and Paul. This writer believes that the context in Romans 9 can, and indeed does, fit together best with this interpretation.

Before proceeding to defend this approach, it would be good to note another variation of it. Some commentators believe that Paul used Hosea in the original sense, but that the original sense of Hosea included the salvation of Gentiles. George N. H. Peters, on one hand, sees believing Gentiles as incorporated into the Israel of prophecy.[16] While Romans 11 certainly supports this approach, it seems that the contexts of Romans 9 and of Hosea 1-2 refer more directly to national Israel—largely unbelieving. On the other hand, several writers have seen the Gentile conversion already foretold in Hosea itself, from the standpoint of OT exegesis. William Kelly sees Gentile salvation in Hos 1:10, on the analogy of Isa 65:1-2.[17] J. Barton Payne notes that, in the OT, "believing Gentiles may be identified simply as Israelites, inseparable from God's people," citing Isa 44:5; 56:3, along with Hos 1:10; 2:23.[18] The view of Kelly and Payne agrees with OT exegesis and theology, but seems out of harmony with the context of Hosea, where the woman who was restored is the *same* woman who was married and who went astray—i.e., national Israel. Also, as will be seen, Paul's quotations need not be construed as referring to Gentile conversions in Paul's day.

NATIONAL ISRAEL IN ROMANS 9:25-26

This writer does not claim to prove dogmatically that Paul is referring to national Israel in these quotations; but he would claim that this interpretation is a viable option which deserves serious consideration. Several weighty arguments favor a literal use of prophecy in these verses.

[16]G. N. H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (3 vols.; 1884; reprinted; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1972), 1. 397.

[17]W. Kelly, *Notes on the Epistle of Paul, the Apostle, to the Romans* (1873; reprinted; Addison, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, 1978) 191-92.

[18]J. B. Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) 477-78.

Paul's normal hermeneutics

Recently Paul's epistles have been subjected to increased study, especially since the advent of the Qumran literature. In general, it now is thought that Paul's hermeneutics resembles that of Palestinian much more than that of Hellenistic Judaism. Richard Longenecker has put it this way:

> Midrashic exegetical methods are prominent in the Pauline letters. In fact, it is midrashic exegesis more than pesher or allegorical exegesis that characterizes the apostle's hermeneutical procedures.[19]

Longenecker would not conclude that Paul never "Christianizes" the OT, yet for him Paul's starting-point is midrashic exegesis.

> In the majority of his Old Testament citations, Paul adheres to the original sense of the passage. Or, if he extends it, it is possible to understand his rationale if we grant him the Jewish presuppositions of "corporate solidarity" and "historical correspondences" and the Christian presuppositions of "eschatological fulfilment" and "messianic presence."[20]

Those who favor the spiritualizing approach in Rom 9:25-26 will say that here Paul uses the Christian presupposition of "eschatological fulfilment," while those who favor the argument from analogy might say he is using the Jewish presupposition of "historical correspondences." On the other hand, his usual method is to "adhere to the original sense of the passage"—in this case, seeing Israel as the object of these passages.

Within midrashic exegesis there is a variety of possible interpretations. The so-called seven rules of Hillel[21] would allow one to interpret the OT as an analogy (Rule 5, "general and particular": a particular rule may be expanded into a general principle)[22], as well as with the

[19]R. N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 125-26. Longenecker effectively argues with E. E. Ellis and others, showing that there are very few if any real examples of allegorical or pesher exegesis in Paul's epistles (118-32).

[20]Ibid., 121. Cf. his earlier book *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) 63, where he sees Paul employing "charismatic interpretation," i.e., "the letter as interpreted by Christ through the Spirit."

[21]*Biblical Exegesis*, 32-38; for a more technical treatment, see E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. and ed. G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Black (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 2. 343-45.

[22]However, this rule was used more with legal texts than with prophecies.

"grammatical-historical" method (e.g., Rule 7, "context": the meaning is established by its context). In this regard, it should be noted that Paul often cites the OT with its own context in view (e.g., Rom 4:3, 9-11; 9:7-9; 15:12). Such an approach in Rom 9:25-26, if not otherwise ruled out by context, would be in harmony with Paul's normal exegesis of the OT.

Background of the quotations

Paul's argument throughout Romans 9 is built on the OT. In vv 6-13 Paul draws from Genesis and Malachi to trace out God's election of Israel in history. In vv 14-18 he selects two passages from Exodus to demonstrate the sovereignty of that election and the role of the non-elect in relation to the elect in God's program. In the rest of the chapter Paul quotes several times from the prophets Isaiah and Hosea, with perhaps an allusion to Jeremiah, to show the results of this election for Israel's history and future.

The remarkable thing about these quotations from the prophets is that, with the one exception of Isa 45:9,[23] every quotation comes from the same period in Isarel's history—the time of impending Assyrian conquest. This conquest came in three major stages: Tiglath-pileser III in 732 B.C., Shalmaneser V and Sargon II in 722 B.C. These quotations are charted below:

verse in Romans 9	*passage quoted*
20	Isa 29:16; 45:9
25	Hos 2:23
26	Hos 1:10
27-28	Isa 10:22-23
29	Isa 1:9
33	Isa 8:14; 28:16

It is more significant that in each case the Assyrian judgment of Israel is the subject of the prophecy. Even in the case of v 20, Isa 29:16 appears to be looking forward to the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.

Throughout all these prophecies runs the same theme: Israel rebels against the Lord; God raises up Assyria as his weapon to judge Israel; God preserves a remnant of Israel; God destroys Assyria for its pride; God restores Israel to repentance and blessing. For example, the passages quoted in vv 25-26 and 27-29 follow this pattern in their

[23]Conservatives usually date the writing of Isaiah 40-66 between 701 and 686 B.C.

own context; note especially Hos 1:6-11; 2:9-14, 19-23; 3:4-5; Isa 1:5-9; 5:20-30; 7:17-20; 8:4; 10:5-27. With this background in view, it appears that the quotations in Rom 9:25-29 are describing the same phenomenon: the present but temporary status of Israel as a people largely unbelieving, disenfranchised, and under judgment by foreign nations. In this light vv 25-26 emphasize neither Israel's future restoration nor the Gentiles' place in the church, but rather the prophetic forecast of Israel's present state in God's program—"not having received mercy," "not my people."

Similarly, the quotations in v 33 fit beautifully with Paul's intention. In Isaiah 8 Judah falls before Assyria; in Isaiah 28 it is the northern kingdom of Israel which falls; in both cases Paul sees the same principle, which is still at work in his nation. Israel fell into her present state because she trusted in her own plots and schemes, rather than in God's mercy and deliverance (Isa 8:6, 12; 28:15). For this reason God judged her by means of Assyria (Isa 8:7-8, 14-15; 28:16-17). Israel failed to have true faith in God and his promises (Isa 8:6, 13, 16-17; 28:16-19). Not only in Rom 9:25-26, but throughout the chapter the OT context provides valuable direction in elucidating Paul's meaning.

"Vessels of wrath" as Israel's oppressors

It is often assumed that the "vessels of wrath" in v 22 are the unbelieving Jews as in vv 6 and 31, while the "vessels of mercy" in v 23 are believers in the church. While v 24 does include believing Jews and Gentiles among the "vessels of mercy," one should not jump to the conclusion that the rest of the Jews are the "vessels of wrath." While Paul certainly considered individual unbelieving Jews as recipients of God's wrath and judgment (e.g. 1 Thess 2:14-16), he held a more optimistic view of his nation's future as a whole (Rom 11:11, 15, 23-24, 26-29; cf. 2 Cor. 3:16).

Yet there is another way to understand this designation, one which is in harmony with the immediate context and suggested by the OT usage. It is suggested that "vessels of wrath" in v 22 is Paul's designation for the heathen nations God uses to judge Israel.

The preceding context in vv 17-21 lends weight to this identification. To defend the sovereignty of God's election, Paul takes the example of Pharaoh. Quoting Exod 9:16, Paul shows that God ordained Pharaoh's power and his stubborn resistance in order to glorify his own greater power in the deliverance of Israel. The context of Exodus justifies Paul's approach (Exod 3:19-20; 4:21; 7:3-5, 13-14, 22-23; 8:15, 32; 9:7, 12, 16, 34-35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4-5, 8, 17-18, 30-31). And indeed, God was glorified in Pharaoh's final defeat

(cf. Moses' song in Exod 15:1-19). But the Egyptian oppression and deliverance also had its purposes in Israel's history and development: a family went down into Egypt; a nation came out of Egypt, a nation redeemed from bondage by the Lord. Pharaoh was a "vessel of wrath," an instrument used to oppress Israel for a time, and yet himself the final recipient of God's wrath in judgment.

The immediate context of vv 22-24 also favors this understanding. There is only one independent verb in this sentence: "What if . . . God *bore* with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted for destruction?" Several clauses modify this main verb: "desiring to show his wrath," "[desiring] to make known his power," "that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy. . . ." Note that these three purposes, to show his wrath, power, and riches of glory, are met by the single action of the verb. If the "vessels of wrath" are the unbelieving Jews, it is difficult to account for the expression Paul uses: God *bears with much longsuffering* unbelieving Jews, who are fitted for destruction. How does this patience toward the Jews display God's wrath and power? Would not it be better to say: he *judges*, *punishes*, or *oppresses* vessels of wrath? On the other hand, if Israel's oppressors are the "vessels of wrath," the statement makes perfect sense: God *bears with much longsuffering* heathen, godless nations, by allowing them to rule over Israel and the world, in order that he might use them as instruments to convey his wrath and power against unbelieving Israel, and in the end his glory and mercy to repentant Israel (along with believing Gentiles), when he destroys those wicked nations. In other words, these verses would equate God's longsuffering toward "vessels of wrath" with the state of Gentile supremacy over Israel, beginning in OT times and continuing intermittently into Paul's day.

Finally, the following context of vv 25-33 supports the identity of the "vessels of wrath" as Israel's oppressors. As seen above, all these quotations refer back to the Assyrian oppression in the second half of the eighth century. In many ways Assyria was a "vessel" of the Lord. The term "vessel" in the Greek NT and in the LXX is σκεῦος (in the LXX it normally represents כְּלִי), a word which designates not only dishes and household utensils, but a great variety of implements, including weapons (e.g., Deut 1:41; Judg 18:11).[24] In Isa 13:5 the Medes are God's weapons to destroy Babylon; here the same Hebrew term כְּלִי is translated in the LXX by the related word ὅπλον, "weapon." It is striking that Paul quotes Isa 10:22-23, which occurs in

[24]See the discussion of LXX usage in C. Maurer, "σκεῦος," *TDNT* 7 (1971) 359-60.

the very context of a lengthy passage describing Assyria as God's weapon against Israel (Isa 10:5-34). In this passage Assyria is called "the rod of my anger," "the club of my wrath," "the ax," "the saw" (vv 5, 15, NIV). Assyria's career is described as follows: God is gracious to Assyria and uses it to punish Israel (vv 5-6, 23), Assyria becomes proud against God (vv 7-14), God destroys Assyria (vv 5, 12, 15-19, 24-34), Israel is blessed with victory and deliverance (vv 17-23). This pattern fits exactly with that of Rom 9:22—God's patience towards vessels of wrath used to display God's judgment and then his merciful deliverance of his people.

It might be tempting at this point to interpret "vessels of wrath" in Rom 9:22 as "vessels which bring wrath." "Of wrath" is certainly a genitive of quality, "vessels characterized by wrath,"[25] but in Paul's context the thought predominates that these vessels will *receive* God's wrath, just as the "vessels of mercy" will receive his mercy. So it is best to take this designation as referring to the planned destruction of these vessels (cf. "son of destruction" in 2 Thess 2:3). This is the same emphasis found concerning Assyria in Isaiah 10.

A PROPOSED SOLUTION

In view of the evidence presented to support national Israel as the object of Rom 9:25-26, the six arguments mentioned earlier favoring a Gentile application can be answered adequately.

1) Paul's mention of Gentile believers in v 24 does not contradict the interpretation suggested here. Paul obviously includes them among God's "vessels of mercy" and often states that they will share in the blessings promised to Israel (Rom 11:17-20; Gal 3:14; Eph 2:11-13, 19; 3:6; cf. Matt 21:43). The question is the proper reference of the prophecy in vv 25-26. Since the word "Gentiles" appears immediately before the citation, many assume that Paul sees some reference to Gentiles in this prophecy. But the whole sentence in which the citation is found begins at v 22, and the main clause is, "What if God endured the vessels of wrath?" This interpretation would link the prophecy to the main clause of the sentence. It appears to this writer that Paul invokes Hosea's prophecies not to prove large-scale Gentile conversions, but to prove the temporary but very real nature of Israel's period of unbelief and disenfranchisement prior to her final restoration. The prophecies cited in vv 27-29 continue that theme, while the nature of Gentile belief, introduced by Paul in v 24, is picked up in v 30.

[25]Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, Vol. 3 of J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) 213.

2) The δέ in v 27 is not a strong adversative and certainly does not demand a change of subject. The NIV leaves it untranslated. If there is any contrast indicated, it is simply between two different aspects of Israel's judgment.

3) 1 Pet 2:10 was addressed primarily to Jewish believers 1 Pet 1:1; Gal 2:9); and in any case, all recognize that only true believers can ever be members of God's promised kingdom (John 3:3).

4) The argument concerning "vessels of wrath" is expanded in the previous section.

5) All three quotations in Rom 10:19-21 (quoting Deut 32:21; Isa 65:1-2) prove the same point: God revealed himself more than sufficiently to Israel, so that she is without excuse. The occurrences of δέ in vv 20, 21 are again not strongly adversative. The "non-nation" in v 19 is, according to Deuteronomy, one of Israel's oppressors, and is favored by God only in this: he gives the "non-nation" power to oppress Israel before he destroys it (Deut 32:27, 36-43). The oppression by these nations is another way God sought to reveal his will to Israel and bring her to repentance. V 20 emphasizes God's continuing to reveal himself to Israel, even as she refused to seek him, and v 21 continues the quotation, emphasizing the continuing nature of this revelation and invitation.

6) In Rom 10:19 Paul speaks of Israel's jealousy being aroused because of Gentile supremacy in the world (cf. Rom 9:22-24); with a play on words in Rom 11:11, 14, Paul seeks the same reaction by announcing Gentile supremacy in the church. Obviously, the believing Gentiles of Romans 11 are not the oppressing powers of Deut 32:21 and Rom 10:19; but in this dispensation, the two coincide in time. The "times of the Gentiles," in contrast to the OT period and the future millennial kingdom, witness Gentile supremacy in both the world and the church (Luke 21:24; Rom 11:25). The OT does have relevance for Paul's entire argument: it provides proof that, before Israel's restoration, she will experience a period of widespread unbelief, disenfranchisement, and subjugation to Gentile power, but that through these trials, and by means of them, God will bring her to repentance and restoration, thus fulfilling the covenants and promises (Rom 11:26, "*in this manner* all Israel will be saved"). Paul thus defines God's unchangeable election (Rom 9:6; 11:1, 28-29), defines his own ministry as it relates to that election (Rom 11:13-32), and declares the wondrous way God reveals his various attributes in this circuitous route leading to Israel's final salvation (Rom 9:11, 14-17, 22-23; 11:22, 32-36).

With this understanding of Paul's argument, one could expand and paraphrase Rom 9:22-26 as follows:

> What if God exercises his sovereignty over Israel by permitting godless Gentile nations to rule over the earth—nations he ultimately will destroy? God is patient with these nations in order to use them as instruments to deal with his own people. As they oppress Israel, God is revealing his wrath and power against her; and as God will later destroy them and deliver his people, granting them repentance and restoration, he will thereby reveal the riches of his glory to that nation. Yes, Israel has been prepared by God to experience his mercy and share his glory, but this blessing will come only to those Israelites who repent and believe in him. For the present only some are believers, who, along with believing Gentiles, will share in these blessings. But most of the nation is still in rebellion and under God's displeasure and judgment; their restoration as a nation is still in the future; as it says in Hosea, "I will call them my people who were not my people, and her beloved who was not beloved; and where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called sons of the living God."

This interpretation of Rom 9:25-26 maintains a consistent hermeneutic for the OT and NT and fits very well with Paul's exact terminology and development of argument in Romans 9-11.