

Did Paul Misinterpret the Old Testament?
Examining Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:23-29
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If you read your New Testament carefully, you will find that the Old Testament is quoted quite often. As you develop the practice of going back to the Old Testament and looking up the passages quoted in the New Testament, you will run into a problem. You will find that the authors of the New Testament often quote the Old Testament in ways that seem to bend, twist, and even break the Old Testament context in which the quoted verses were originally written. The Apostle Paul's use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:24-29 is particularly difficult in this regard. Paul pulls verses from the book of Hosea and from the book of Isaiah and quotes them in this short passage. The passage is notoriously difficult to interpret because Paul seems to use verses from Hosea and Isaiah in ways that the prophets never intended. In fact, the way Paul seems to bend and twist the Old Testament Scriptures in this passage has caused us to scratch our heads and ask the question: "Did Paul misinterpret the Old Testament?"

The Key To Understanding Scripture

The leading conservative seminaries tell us that we must learn Hebrew and Greek in order to *really* understand Scripture: "Become a Hebrew and Greek scholar and the treasures of God's Word will be opened up to you!" This is simply not true. The authors of this article have learned Hebrew and Greek and although we have found this knowledge helpful at times, it is by no means the key to understanding the Scriptures. In fact, knowing Hebrew and Greek can be detrimental to your growth in understanding God's Word. Consider the many biblical scholars that have spent decades studying Hebrew and Greek. They can go into great linguistic detail about a particular word or phrase, but too often they haven't got a clue as to the meaning and application of the passage in which the word or phrase occurs. Often biblical scholars can give great linguistic detail about verb tenses, but they can't tell you how a passage of Scripture or a book of the Bible relates to the rest of Scripture. This fact should make it clear that you don't have to be a linguistic genius to understand God's Word. The key to unlocking the treasures of God's Word is reading Scripture in context. It is the art of reading the nouns, verbs, and adjectives in a particular passage within the flow of the argument in which they are written and then relating your findings to the whole of Scripture.

Imagine sitting in a run-of-the-mill large church on a Sunday morning where the message is focused on Romans 9:24-29. These verses magically appear up on a giant screen that everyone can see. The pastor begins to speak and his three-point rhyming outline replaces the verses that were up on the screen just long enough for you to read them. Even in a good large church, the style of teaching generally militates against learning how to interpret God's Word. The typical style is that you make a point and you quote a verse and it's placed on a big screen using the latest computer software. There is nothing inherently wrong with gizmos and hi-tech stuff. But they can actually get in the way of correctly handling and understanding Scripture. When you flash a verse up on the big-screen as a proof for what you are saying, rarely is there the chance or even the inclination to consider the context of the verse. It appears on the screen isolated from the rest of Scripture. You don't get to see what comes above and below the verse in question and you are not being taught how to handle your Bible. You watch a pleasing display where you can easily read the Scriptures being talked about without having to put on your reading glasses and work at flipping around in your Bible. We love to use the latest and greatest gizmos, but we should never let them become an obstacle to learning how to interpret Scripture. The intent of those using these gadgets is to help you, not to handicap you. But oftentimes, despite the best of intentions, people walk away from years of sitting under the teaching of a church unable to interpret Scripture on their own.

The New Testament Context

Rather than make the mistake of isolating the verses we are trying to interpret, we want to consider these verses in the light of the whole book of Romans and particularly in the light of Paul's concerns in chapter 9. The first eight chapters of the book of Romans discuss the gospel and this amazing salvation that everyone for whom Jesus died receives. The wrath of God that everyone deserves is perfectly satisfied by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross for every believer. Because of the payment for sins gained by the death of Christ, every believer is declared righteous in the court of heaven (justified) and receives a changed life in which he will persevere in loving Jesus and growing in holiness until he dies (sanctification). In Romans 9-11 Paul explains the place of Israel in God's grand plan to save a people and make them His own. In the beginning of Romans nine, Paul explains how Israel as a nation had a bucket full of Divine benefits. But, unfortunately, salvation was not one of the benefits that Israel received. In verse six Paul writes, "It is not as though God's word had failed." Now why would we think God's word had failed? It looks like God's word had failed because Israel as a nation had not believed. A very small number of Israelites believed and currently believe, but most reject Christ. They are called the people of God, but they are the very people who were persecuting Christ and His disciples at the time when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans. It looks as if God's plan went awry. But, according to Paul in Romans 9, that would be a false conclusion:

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be

reckoned." In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring (Romans 9:6-8).

Paul is saying that not all of the physical people of God are the spiritual people of God. Just because you are a physical child of Abraham in no way means that you are also a spiritual child of Abraham. The only way you become part of the real people of God, the spiritual children of Abraham, is by God choosing you.

God has always been a God who chooses those on whom he desires to have mercy, and those He desires to harden. This causes us to ask two questions: (1) How can God blame me for rejecting Him if He is the all-powerful and sovereign God who is controlling me and causing me to reject Him? (2) If God has not chosen to make me part of the real people of God, to save me, then why did He make me in the first place? The answers to these questions are humbling and amazing. First, we are told that we cannot question God's right to do as He pleases. When we question God in this way, according to Paul, we have overstepped our bounds because we are mere creatures and He is the Creator: "But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this? Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?'" (Romans 9:20,21) In answer to the second question Paul gives us a glimpse into the mind of God. The reason God made people whom He will not save is so that those people He saves will be able to better grasp the great value of the mercy they have received: "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath--prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory..." (Romans 9: 22,23). Therefore, even those who will not be saved have an important part to play in saving God's people, the elect. We are now on the doorstep of the verses we want to consider, verses 24-29. We have considered Paul's argument leading up to these verses so that we now have the light by which we can read and understand the Apostle's thoughts.

God will bring Gentiles to spiritual salvation: Paul's Use of Hosea 1:10 and 2:23

In verses 23b-26 Paul begins to explain just who the elect are. We find in verse 24 that God's elect is a group made up of both Jews *and* Gentiles:

What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory, even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," and, "It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God' " (Romans 9:24).

Notice that Paul uses the quotations from Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 to support the fact that God has included Gentiles in His plan of salvation. Although he is talking about God's election to salvation of both Jews and Gentiles, the emphasis in verse 24 is on the inclusion of the Gentiles. Paul's point is that those who were once strangers and aliens to the promise and hope of salvation are now included. The gospel first came to the Jews. Paul went to the synagogues first. The Jews rejected the gospel message. Paul shook the dust off his feet and took the gospel to the Gentiles. From that point on, the preponderance of the people of God has been Gentiles. Now if you didn't pay attention to the original context of Paul's quotation from the book of Hosea, this might seem pretty straightforward. Let's take another look at the quotations: "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," and, "It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God'" (Romans 9:25,26; Hosea 1:10, 2:23). Who are those who Paul identifies as "not my people" and "not my loved one"? Well, they were Gentiles of course! Paul argues that God is now choosing Gentiles to be a part of His family—God is saving Gentiles—and Paul uses Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 to support his argument.

The Old Testament tells us over and over that the Jews were God's people. Now God is going to bring the Gentiles into the people of God. Paul is using Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 to support his premise that God is opening up the door of salvation to the Gentiles that was previously shut. For 1500 years the nations of the world did not have the gospel, which the Jews had (at least in picture form). The only way the Gentiles could find out about the gospel was to somehow bump up against the nation of Israel. Israel was a tiny nation and the chances of a random Gentile finding Israel and getting adopted into the culture and religion was slim to none. From Sinai to the time of Christ, the bulk of the world was ignored when it came to God's revelation of a way to be accepted by Him. Civilizations came and went without ever getting to hear the Gospel. Were any of God's elect there? Apparently they were not. But, Paul tells us in these verses that God is changing all that! Paul's argument is clear and it is as easy to grasp as falling off of a log.

God Will Save a Remnant of Israelites From Spiritual Destruction: Paul's Use of Isaiah 1:9 and 10:22-23

In verses 27-29 Paul turns his attention from the Gentiles to Israel and quotes from the book of Isaiah:

Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality." It is just as Isaiah said

previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah" (Isaiah 1:9).

Just as in the previous verses Paul told us which group of people was being referred to, Gentiles, so now Paul tells us which group is being referred to, Jews. The meaning of the verses is straightforward in Paul's argument: Only a small number of Jews will be (spiritually) saved. Although there are many, many, many physical descendants of Abraham (like the sand by the sea), only a small number will be chosen by God to be saved. Unlike the time God wiped out Sodom and Gomorrah completely, the Lord has been and will be merciful with Israel by choosing to save a small number of Israelites.

The Original Context

Now that we have established Paul's interpretation of the verses he pulls out of the Old Testament, we need to zoom in on the texts themselves and consider their original contexts in the Old Testament. What did Hosea and Isaiah intend these verses to mean? As we compare Paul's interpretation of these verses to the meaning of these verses in their Old Testament context we will begin to see a hermeneutic arise from Scripture. We will catch a glimpse of how God, the Divine author of all of Scripture, interprets His own words! But we are getting ahead of ourselves. First we must simply examine the verses that Paul quotes in Romans 9:24-29 in their original contexts.

God will restore the nation of Israel both spiritually and physically: Hosea's Use of Hosea 1:10 and 2:23

Hosea is a pretty simple story. God tells Hosea the prophet that he must marry a girl named Gomer. He is told that she is a prostitute and that she will be an adulteress throughout their marriage. Hosea marries her and she starts shacking up with all sorts of guys. She gets in trouble and is sold into slavery. Hosea buys her back. Once again she begins to sleep around. She constantly cheats on him and Hosea constantly takes her back and cares for her. We are told in the book of Hosea that Gomer represents Israel and her unfaithfulness to God, while Hosea illustrates God's patience and kindness toward Israel. The entire book of Hosea deals exclusively with the nation Israel.

Hosea 2:23, which is the first of the two verses that Paul quotes in Romans 9:24-26, is part of a rather typical passage about the restoration of the nation of Israel that is frequently found in the Minor Prophets. It is all about bringing Israel back into right relationship with God and about Israel experiencing the blessing of God in the form of health, wealth, and real estate. Chapter 2 is actually full of bad news—that Israel is to be punished for her unfaithfulness. Verse 13 is the last word about the punishment Israel is going to get and then the tide turns in verse 14 to restoration:

I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot," declares the LORD . "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her" (Hosea 2:13-14).

Verses 21-23 is a continuation of this tender and hopeful theme of God restoring his people, the nation of Israel, in a day in the future:

"In that day I will respond," declares the LORD - "I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one. 'I will say to those called 'Not my people, ' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God' " (Hosea 2:21-23).

God, through Hosea, tells the people of Israel that He will restore them in the future. He will make the people he is now rejecting—the physical Israelites—his people again. Remember, Gomer personifies Israel and therefore her children (who are the product of adultery) are called "not my loved one" and "not my people" because God is rejecting them. The people that are "not my loved one" are the physical Israelites and the promise here is that to those same people God will say "you are my people" and they will respond "you are my God." This is really simple. Israel is going to come back to God (because God is going to draw her) in spiritual faithfulness. This will result in Israel coming back to the physical land. It couldn't be any clearer unless Hosea had drawn us a picture!

Now let's take a close look Hosea 1:10, which is the other verse that Paul quoted in Romans nine. We need to read Hosea 1:2-11 to grasp the context:

When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD ." So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. Then the LORD said to Hosea, "Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel." Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the LORD said to Hosea, "Call her Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them. Yet I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them—not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the LORD their God." After she had weaned Lo-

Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. Then the LORD said, "Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God. **"Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'**" The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited, and they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel (Hosea 1:2-11, emphasis added).

Verse 10 is straightforward. Gomer's children are the children born out of unfaithfulness. Gomer was an adulteress and the children were the fruit of her unfaithfulness to her husband. Gomer and her children are an illustration for Israel and for us about the state of Israel's relationship to God. The children are given names that signify God's rejection of Israel. The Lord is rejecting the Israelites for their spiritual infidelity. In Hosea 1:10 God tells us that in the future the Lord will reverse this rejection. He will multiply the people of Israel and restore the nation both spiritually and physically. This reversal is spelled out in a reiteration of the Abrahamic promise of fruitfulness,¹ the new names given with positive meaning, and then in specific and concrete promises of what the Lord will do for the nation of Israel. Once again, this text is not difficult to understand in its original context.

God will save a tiny remnant of ethnic Israelites from physical destruction: Isaiah's Use of Isaiah 1:9 and 10:22-23

Unless you have a grasp on the structure of the book of Isaiah, it will be a difficult book for you to read. In a nutshell, the book of Isaiah is structured like the English Bible. In the English Bible there are 66 books and there are 66 chapters in the book of Isaiah. The first 39 books of the Bible make up the Old Testament and the first 39 chapters of Isaiah are generally about God judging the nation of Israel and then about God judging all those nations He uses to judge Israel. The next 27 books of the Bible make up the New Testament and the next 27 chapters of the book of Isaiah (chapters 40-66) are generally about God's future blessing for the nation of Israel. Both of the quotations Paul chose to use in Romans 9 fall in this first section—the judgment section of the book.

Chapter 1 describes how, in spite of the Israelites' constant rebellion, there will still be a remnant of Israel that will not be physically destroyed:

Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD ; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness— only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers. The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a city under siege. **Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah** (Isaiah 1:5-9, emphasis added).

The Lord completely wiped out Sodom and Gomorrah, leaving no survivors. But when God sends the Assyrians to destroy the Israelites, He is going to be merciful and leave some survivors.

The context of chapter 10 is a prophecy of Isaiah that describes the time when God will judge Israel. It describes a physical judgment that God will bring on the land and on the people of Israel:

Does the ax raise itself above him who swings it, or the saw boast against him who uses it? As if a rod were to wield him who lifts it up, or a club brandish him who is not wood! Therefore, the Lord, the LORD Almighty, will send a wasting disease upon his sturdy warriors; under his pomp a fire will be kindled like a blazing flame. The Light of Israel will become a fire, their Holy One a flame; in a single day it will burn and consume his thorns and his briars. The splendor of his forests and fertile fields it will completely destroy, as when a sick man wastes away. And the remaining trees of his forests will be so few that a child could write them down. In that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no longer rely on him who struck them down but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God. **Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous. The Lord, the LORD Almighty, will carry out the destruction decreed upon the whole land** (Isaiah 10:15-23, emphasis added).

Isaiah is prophesying loud and clear that God is going to physically destroy, kill, and scatter Israel to such a degree that although there are many of them right now, only a remnant of Israel will be saved from this destruction. According to Isaiah, only a tiny remnant of ethnic Israelites will return to the physical land the Lord gave them after this judgment occurs.

¹ Notice the connection to the Abrahamic promise. See Genesis 22:17.

The Blessing of a Good Chart

Now that we have looked at all of the passages and carefully examined each verse in context, it is time to put it all together in one eye-pleasing chart. The blessing of a good chart is that it allows you to summarize a lot of information and highlight contrasts in a way that is impossible with simple prose. So, consider the contrast between the original meaning of the Old Testament texts and Paul's understanding of those texts in the following chart:

Scripture Reference	Original Old Testament Meaning	Paul's Interpretation in Romans 9:24-29
Hosea 1:10, 2:23	God will restore the nation of Israel both spiritually and physically.	God will bring Gentiles to spiritual salvation.
Isaiah 1:9, 10:22-23	God will save a tiny remnant of ethnic Israelites from physical destruction.	God will save a tiny remnant from among the ethnic Israelites from Spiritual destruction..

When the physical and spiritual salvation of Israel as a whole is being referred to as the fulfillment of prophecy to Israel, Paul interprets it as referring to spiritual salvation of the Gentiles. When Paul quotes a prophecy regarding God's plan to save a small part of Israel from physical and spiritual destruction, he interprets it as referring to that small portion of the elect of Israel that is being and will be saved from spiritual destruction through the death of Jesus Christ. These are radically different understandings or uses of the same texts and therefore we are in need of some explanation. We believe that the explanation is found in Paul's biblical model.

Why Paul Replaces Israel With the Gentiles When Interpreting Some Prophecies: Paul Was a Replacement Theologian

If someone wants to say something nasty about New Covenant Theology, he will typically crinkle his nose and say, "New Covenant Theology is just replacement theology." By this comment he is referring to the belief that the church "replaces" Israel as God's chosen people. As we have noted above, Paul sees the current spiritual salvation of Gentiles fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies concerning the physical and spiritual salvation of Old Covenant Israel as a whole. The spiritual salvation of the Gentiles, in Paul's mind, replaces the physical/spiritual restoration of the nation of Israel. Therefore, Paul's use of the two passages from Hosea in this manner reveals that Paul is a replacement theologian.² Correctly labeling Paul a "replacement theologian" tells us what Paul believes, and we have dealt with that extensively so far. What we now need to figure out is why Paul sees Israel as being replaced by the Gentiles.

As we dig into Scripture we will find that this "replacement motif" is not an isolated incident in Romans chapter nine, but rather, this was the common understanding of how Scripture fit together shared by all of the authors of Scripture. Beginning with the Gospels we find that Jesus and the Apostles repeatedly went first to the Jews, who rejected the gospel, and then to the Gentiles, who often responded favorably. In the introduction of the Gospel of John, the Apostle makes a summary statement about this: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God- children born not of natural descent or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:11-13). "That which was his own" was the nation of Israel. The constant emphasis in the New Testament is that one's genealogy has nothing to do with one's spiritual health. There is a reconstitution of the people of God moving from natural descent (being a blood relative of Abraham) to spiritual descent (possession of the faith of Abraham or being "born of God").

In Matthew chapter eight, when Jesus is talking to a Roman centurion, the soldier expresses his trust that Jesus has the authority to simply speak and it will be done. That is, he expressed his conviction that Jesus was God Himself. Jesus goes on to compare the faith of this Gentile to the unfaithfulness of Israel:

When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:10-12).

The "sons of the kingdom" are the nation of Israel and they are to be "cast out into the outer darkness" into eternal punishment in hell (Matthew 22:13) which is where all unbelievers spend eternity. D.A. Carson writes concerning this passage:

So the 'subjects of the kingdom' are the Jews, who see themselves as sons of Abraham..., belonging to the kingdom by right...But Jesus reverses roles (cf. 21:43); and the sons of the kingdom are thrown aside, left out of

² We don't like the term "replacement" because of the way it is used and because of certain misunderstandings that can result from the term. Instead I would rather use the term "fulfillment theology" and "fulfillment theologian." But since "replacement theology" is the label most folks have heard before, we have decided to use that in this article.

the future messianic banquet, consigned to darkness where there are tears and gnashing of teeth- elements common to descriptions of Gahanna, hell.³

Matthew makes it clear that the majority of Israelites are going to face God's eternal judgment because they have rejected Him. In this passage Matthew states that a people who actually love God will replace the Israelites in the kingdom of heaven. Later in Matthew's Gospel, we find an even more shocking indictment of Israel:

"Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? 'Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.'"

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet (Matthew 21:33-45).

The Pharisees were the religious leaders of Israel. When the leaders are indicted, the followers are included in that indictment. This parable is in keeping with the consistent theme throughout the Gospels: Israel is being rejected as the people of God and a new people will inherit the kingdom, "a people who will produce its fruit." Notice, this parable is speaking of the entire history of Israel. It says, "They killed his servants." "His servants" can only be identified as the prophets that God sent to Israel throughout the Old Covenant era:

So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers... O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate (Matthew 23:31,32,37,38).

So the parable of the tenants really tells us that it is God's understanding that throughout Israel's history, she was always a rebellious and unbelieving nation. Israel culminated her rebellion by instigating the crucifixion of the Son of God. Jesus *seemed to be* turning his back on them as a people, taking away the offer of salvation, and turning to the Gentiles.

The Apostle Paul's reaction to the Jews is strikingly similar to Jesus' rejection of this rebellious people. In Acts 13 we find Paul speaking to Jews in Psidian Antioch, where he is getting abused as usual:

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, **we now turn to the Gentiles** (13:43-46, emphasis added).

In the book of Acts we see Paul first going to the synagogues or those places where Jews gathered. But they were so consistent in their rejection of the Gospel and their abuse of Paul that Paul gradually turned from even striving to evangelize them. We find Paul in a similar situation in Corinth a few chapters later:

When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. **From now on I will go to the Gentiles.**" Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized (Acts 18:5-7, emphasis added).

³D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary* 8, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1984, pages 202-203.

Paul is clearly following in the footsteps of the Lord by turning away from the physical people of God and going to the Gentiles with the Gospel.

Some of the final words that Luke pens in the book of Acts are Paul's. The Apostle is speaking to Jewish leaders about the Gospel and they reject his message in their usual fashion. So Paul tells them about God's decree that the Israelites will remain spiritually blind and that God is turning to the Gentiles:

They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: " 'Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' "Therefore I want you to know that **God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen**" (Acts 28:23-28, emphasis added).

Jesus came to the Jews with the Gospel and they rejected him. Paul came to the Jews with the Gospel and they rejected him. Jesus and Paul finally turned their backs on the Jews and went to the Gentiles.

The message in the Gospels and Acts is that the long awaited salvation has finally come and the Jews have rejected it as they have always rejected God. The message is that the Israelites have rebelled against God for the last time. God is turning from the Jews to the Gentiles. This is why Paul sees the current spiritual salvation of Gentiles fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies concerning the physical and spiritual salvation of Old Covenant Israel as a whole. Paul was a Replacement Theologian.

Why Paul Doesn't Replace Israel With the Gentiles When Interpreting Some Prophecies: Paul Was a Remnant Theologian

When Paul quotes a prophecy regarding God's plan to save a small part of Israel from physical and spiritual destruction, he interprets it as referring to that small portion of the elect of Israel that is being and will be saved from spiritual destruction through the death of Jesus Christ. As you read your New Testament, it is not until you get to Paul's argument about God, Israel, and salvation in Romans 9-11 that you find any hope for Israel at all. As we noted above, the message of the Gospels and Acts is that God is judging Israel but opening the door of salvation to the world. Paul understood that the nation of Israel in the Old Covenant era was not an end in and of itself. It was only the physical fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. The spiritual fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant is found in the church, the New Covenant people of God. Yet, in the New Covenant era, individual Israelites still have a role to play. They can become part of the New Covenant people of God. Although it looks like God is completely done with physical Israel, that He closed the door of salvation to them,⁴ in the book of Romans Paul tells us that God is going to save a remnant of ethnic Israelites during the New Covenant era:

"I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah--how he appealed to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? ⁴And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." **So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace** (Romans 11:1-5, emphasis added).

Paul is telling us not to get so carried away with our replacement theology that we turn our backs on Israel—that we stop sharing the Gospel with individual Jews. If we do that, we would be “boasting over the branches”:

If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his

⁴ We have written an article on that addresses this issue extensively entitled, *Is There a Future For Israel in Romans 11?* You can find this article online at http://www.ids.org/pdf/Romans_11.pdf or in Volume 1, Issue 2 of *The Journal of New Covenant Theology*.

kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! (Romans 11:17-24).

We must try and jump into the sandals (and perhaps togas) of the Gentile Christians that Paul is addressing in the church in Rome. The Gentile Christians had experienced nothing but grief from the hands of the Jews. It seemed as if the Jews were constantly persecuting them.⁵ Remember that they had all read (or heard) the story about both Jesus and Paul turning from the Jews to the Gentiles with the gospel. They had begun to believe that they were now God's true people, and that the Jews were no longer in God's plan of salvation. Paul gives a stinging rebuke to these Gentiles for carelessly dismissing the Jews. Notice that the thrust of Paul's argument is not that there will be an overwhelming conversion of national Israel in the distant future. That would deny the replacement theology that Paul has already explained. Rather, the Apostle is saying: "You think Israel is entirely rejected and you Gentiles have a corner on the market of salvation. You are wrong. It is actually more natural for Jews to be saved than for Gentiles to be saved." Paul is shouting at those Gentiles who have grasped one strand of truth in Scripture—Replacement Theology—that they must also embrace another important truth, Remnant Theology. So, the reason Paul doesn't replace Israel with the Gentiles when he interprets prophecies about God saving a remnant of Israelites is that Paul actively teaches that God still saves Individual Jews.

Conclusion

There is a lot to learn from Paul's use of the Old Testament. Even though at first glance it seems that Paul misinterpreted the Old Testament when he quoted Hosea and Isaiah in Romans 9:24-29, he didn't. Having been given more light by God as to His plan of salvation than any of the Old Testament prophets, Paul had the big picture in view when he wrote his inspired interpretation of these Old Testament prophecies. He understood that the nation of Israel in the Old Covenant era functioned only as a picture of the true people of God. He grasped that, as a whole, Israel was always an unbelieving people. Like Jesus, Paul taught that God was replacing the Old Covenant nation of Israel that God called "my people," with a people that would actually love God and live for Him. Paul said that this new people would be made up primarily of Gentiles. Therefore Paul tells us how God interprets Old Testament prophecy about national Israel. God's promises to save the nation of Israel are fulfilled in God saving the Gentiles. When God spoke through the prophets he spoke in types and shadows. Paul sheds more Divine light on the subject and shows us that God's promises for the salvation of one tiny nation are fulfilled in salvation going to the world and God saving people from every tribe, nation, and language. He tells us that these promises remain and give continuing hope to individual Israelites. If they repent and believe, then God will still save them out of that rebellious nation.

⁵ Acts 8:1-3, 9:1, 12:1-5, 17:5-9