

# Exegetical Analysis – Ephesians 2:11-22

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**11 Therefore, remember that formerly you—the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands— 12 remember that you were at that time without Christ, alienated from the citizenship of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.** (11 Διὸ μνημονεύετε ὅτι ποτὲ ὑμεῖς τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκὶ, οἱ λεγόμενοι ἀκροβυστίᾳ ὑπὸ τῆς λεγομένης περιτομῆς ἐν σαρκὶ χειροποιήτου, 12 ὅτι ἦτε τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ χωρὶς Χριστοῦ, ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, ἐλπίδα μὴ ἔχοντες καὶ ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ. 13 νυνὶ δὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὑμεῖς οἱ ποτε ὄντες μακρὰν ἐγενήθητε ἐγγὺς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ.)

In recollection of the previous words made by Paul, individual sinners have obtained through the gracious gift of salvation a new standing before God (2:1-10). They were dead in their sins and transgressions (vs.1), they walked in accordance with the course of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air (i.e. Satan) in (vs.2), they conducted themselves in the lust of the flesh, and were by nature children of wrath (vs.3), but God (notice the one who initiates), when they were dead in their sins made them alive together in Christ, by grace they have been saved through faith, which is entirely a work of God (vs.4-9). Paul states that *we* (transitioning from *you* to *we*) are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, that were prepared beforehand for us (vs.10).

At this point in Paul’s letter, things could have been left at a very individualistic level, excluding the notion of inclusion and union into something greater, but he doesn’t leave things hanging. He brings together the concept of *union* here as we proceed into (vs.11). Paul, in linking back to what has been previously said, asks the Gentiles “the uncircumcision” to “remember.” What does Paul want them to remember? He wants them to be reminded of the time when there was *disunion*. There was a great gulf that existed between Jew and Gentile prior to the coming of the Lord Jesus. The contrast that was made between the Jew and Gentile was on the basis of circumcision, or on the basis of their relationship to the covenant of Abraham (cf. Gen 15-17). The Jews marveled in their relationship with Abraham (cf. John 8:37-45, Rom. 2:17-29), constantly setting themselves above others because of their physical circumcision and relationship to Abraham as their physical father. Though the Jews “the circumcision” were closer to God by and through their covenant relationship (cf. Rom. 9:1-5), they also had to be brought near and remolded into something “new.”

In (vs.12) Paul tells the Ephesians to *remember* 5 privileges that they were without as Gentiles:

1. ***That they were at a specific time without Christ*** – As Hoehner points out, “The imperfect verb ἦτε “were,” and the temporal datives τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ “at that time” (which designate a point of time) refer back to the period corresponding to that of the enclitic particle ποτὲ in verse 11, that is, the extended period of time before conversion in which they did have these five privileges.”<sup>1</sup> There was a point in time before their conversion that they did not experience these promises.

<sup>1</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002), 355.

The Gentiles were not promised the Messiah through special revelation given to them as a people, they were not anticipating that one would come to rescue them from their sins, Israel however had that promise, the promise of the Messiah (cf. Gen. 3:15; 49:10; Isa 7:14; 9:1-7, etc.).

Albert Barnes says it well, “You were without the knowledge of the Messiah. You had not heard of him; of course, you had not embraced him. You were living without any of the hopes and consolations which you now have, from having embraced him. The object of the apostle is to remind them of the deplorable condition in which they were by nature; and nothing would better express it than to say they were “without Christ,” or that they had no knowledge of a Saviour. They knew of no atonement for sin. They had no assurance of pardon. They had no well-founded hope of eternal life. They were in a state of darkness and condemnation, from which nothing but a knowledge of Christ could deliver them. All Christians may in like manner be reminded of the fact that, before their conversion, they were “without Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

2. ***That they were alienated from the citizenship of Israel*** – Further expanding the previous point they were also alienated (or excluded) from the “citizenship” or “commonwealth” of Israel. The Greek term πολιτείας means “citizenship, or with reference to a commonwealth or state.”<sup>3</sup> The Gentiles had never truly been a part of the commonwealth of Israel as active participants.<sup>4</sup> Sure, Gentiles could be admitted into Judaism as proselytes, but as a whole community, Gentiles stood outside of this citizenship. Hoehner connects this relationship to citizenship in Rome well, “The Ephesians could relate well to this concept for they knew what it was like to live within the political state of Rome without being a citizen of Rome with all the accompanying privileges.”<sup>5</sup>
3. ***That they were strangers to the covenants of promise*** – In Romans 9:1-5 Paul tells us that the promises were made to Israel. It is clear that before this period of conversion and union in Christ, the Gentile had no true relationship to the covenants God had made with his people Israel. What are the covenants of promise? It seems best to understand the covenants of promise as those covenants that were outlined in the Old Testament (OT) as the unconditional covenants (i.e., the Abrahamic, Davidic, and the New Covenant). These covenants (which contain promises) were given to the nation of Israel, they were not *directly* stated as promises to the Gentiles. Gentiles were promised to experience their blessings (Gen 12:3), but they were not direct promises given to Gentiles. This is very important when looking at Paul’s argument in Romans 11. Ethnic Israel (National Israel) was cut-off from the olive tree (*the place of blessing*) which they had experienced as a people since the time of the Abrahamic Covenant which was upheld by the root (*the patriarchs*) and now Gentiles (*as unnatural branches*) have been grafted into the place of blessing and experience the covenants as they extend from Abraham’s Covenant down through the Davidic, and New.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Barnes, Albert. "Commentary on Ephesians 2:12". "Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible". <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bnb/ephesians-2.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Hoehner, 356.

<sup>4</sup> As Abbott notes, “Naturally it is the theocratic constitution from which they were excluded; and the name Israel implies this, since this was the name of the people in their theocratic relation.” T.K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 59 George St, 1991), 58.

<sup>5</sup> Hoehner, 357.

<sup>6</sup> See my exegetical analysis on Romans 11: <https://sakeofthetruth.wordpress.com/2020/11/09/israels-future-an-exegetical-analysis-of-romans-11-1-36/>

4. ***They had no hope*** – The Gentiles had absolutely no hope given to them. They were left in a desolate place, as wanderers without any sort of anchor. Even when the Messiah came his mission was solely focused upon the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 10:6). It wasn’t until the second commission outlined in Matthew 28:18-20 that the focus shifted to Gentile inclusion (post-resurrection).<sup>7</sup>
5. ***They were without God in this world*** – The last and final thing that the Gentiles lacked was a relationship with the true God of this world. They had suppressed the truth in unrighteousness, had embraced all the foreign and pagan gods of this world, had followed after everything but the God of this world.<sup>8</sup> Now, things were changing for them as we will see momentarily.

Hoehner sums up this section quite well,

“In conclusion, Paul asks the Ephesians to remember their situation before conversion when they were considered uncircumcised by the Jews. They were a people who lacked five distinct privileges that the Jews enjoyed. These were provided to Israel because God revealed himself and made covenants with this nation. It does not mean that the Jews took full advantage of this privileged situation, as seen in both the OT and NT, but they had a distinct advantage over the Gentiles. Paul shows next that though the Jews had advantages over the Gentiles in the past, God has made it possible for both Jews and gentiles in Christ to be equal before God. This does not mean that the nation Israel becomes the church, for Israel still exists as a separate entity apart from the church (Rom 9:1-5). Paul demonstrates that believing Jews and Gentiles become the church (Eph 2:13-22) but that unbelieving Jews and Gentiles still remain as two separate entities distinct from the church (1 Cor 10:32).”<sup>9</sup>

This point cannot be stressed enough. Gentiles are not said to be here brought into the nation of Israel, or that they are now spiritual Israel.<sup>10</sup> The point that Paul is making is that at one time Gentiles had not been blessed with the privileges that they are seeing now. They were to remember where they *were* and now to understand where they *are* in Christ.

In (vs.12) we saw the past condition of the Gentiles, but Paul will shift his focus in (vs.13) to their present reality. But now (*vuví - present condition*) in Christ, you (Gentiles) who were formally far off (as seen in (vs.12)) have been brought near, by the blood of Christ. Gentiles were often seen as far off in the OT.<sup>11</sup> Israel would have been seen always as near.<sup>12</sup> However, what were they near and far from? It is likely that Paul is saying that the Jews were near to God, and the Gentiles were far from God.<sup>13</sup> This is further grounded by the fact that the Jews were near because they had revelation from God. Again, the argument here is not that the Gentile is made a Jew because they have been made near, nor does it mean that the

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Alford says, “hope (not ‘covenanted hope’ ( $\tauὸν ἐλπί.τ.$ ), but ‘hope’ at all.” Alford, Henry. “Commentary on Ephesians 2”. Alford’s Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/hac/ephesians-2.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Rom. 1:18-21

<sup>9</sup> Hoehner, 361.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Vlach states that, “There is no transformation or transcending of the concept of Israel. There is no enlargement or expansion of Israel to include Gentiles, although there is expansion of the “people of God” concept to include believing Gentiles alongside believing Israelites (Eph. 2:11-22).” Taken from: <http://mikevlach.blogspot.com/2016/12/dispensationalism-and-continuity.html>

<sup>11</sup> Deut. 28:49, 29:22; 1 Kgs 8:41; Isa. 5:26; Jer. 5:15

<sup>12</sup> Ps. 148:14

<sup>13</sup> Robert Saucy states, “All would agree that the emphasis in the passage is on a nearness to God.” Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993), 160.

Gentile is now a part of the theocratic state Israel because they have been made near to God. The nearness is now seen in their relationship together with Jews (*union*) in Christ. Here, it is Christ that is the means by which both Jew and Gentile are brought near to God. This truth is seen in several texts (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 2:16; Col 1:20-22). Through the blood of Christ, and through his work alone, the Gentiles have been brought near/in union with God. They are not on different footings, there is not one group that is near and one group that is far, through Christ both groups are brought together in union.

**14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups one and broke down the dividing wall of the partition 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might create the two into one new man, making peace, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, having in Himself put to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached the good news of peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; 18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.** (14 Αὐτὸς γάρ ἐστιν ἡ εἰρήνη ἡμῶν, ὁ ποιήσας τὰ ἀμφότερα ἐν καὶ τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, τὴν ἔχθραν, ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ αὐτοῦ 15 τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν καταργήσας, ἵνα τοὺς δύο κτίσῃ ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς ἓν καὶ νὸν ἄνθρωπον ποιῶν εἰρήνην, 16 καὶ ἀποκαταλλάξῃ τοὺς ἀμφοτέρους ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι τῷ Θεῷ διὰ τοῦ σταυροῦ, ἀποκτείνας τὴν ἔχθραν ἐν αὐτῷ· 17 καὶ ἐλθὼν εὐηγγελίσατο εἰρήνην ὑμῖν τοῖς μακρὰν καὶ εἰρήνην τοῖς ἐγγύς· 18 ὅτι δι’ αὐτοῦ ἔχομεν τὴν προσαγωγὴν οἱ ἀμφότεροι ἐν ἐνὶ Πνεύματι πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα.)

Now that Paul has explained the *disunion* that was found in relation to the Gentiles, Paul will unpack the *union* that is found in Christ. The “He” found in (vs.14) is a reference back to Jesus in (vs.13). Jesus “our peace” (εἰρήνη) has brought together two groups and broke down the dividing wall of the partition. How did this happen? Jesus brought together the *circumcision* and the *uncircumcision* by his blood. The hostility that was present between the Jews and Gentiles has now subsided, salvific priority has been removed, Jews and Gentiles now have access to God through the same means, the blood of Jesus. Christ as our peace united two groups, but he do so by breaking down the dividing wall, but what is this wall? As Hoehner states,

“...it makes good sense to consider that the “wall of partition” was not a literal wall but a metaphorical wall that divided Jews and Gentiles. Often an attitude of superiority crept in that in turn engendered hostility. This metaphorical wall of partition was destroyed.”<sup>14</sup>

The Jew was prideful, as we saw above, in their status before the Lord, that they had created their own wall that divided and separated themselves from the Gentiles. Jesus destroyed this hostility.

In (vs.15) we see directly how Jesus did this, by his flesh. In the crucifixion of Christ, through the cross and shedding of his blood, he rendered inoperative the law of commandments in decrees. Jesus and his cross work didn’t *destroy* or *abolish* the law, but he *fulfilled* the law. The introduction of the law is now brought to the forefront. The law here is a reference to the entire Mosaic Law, not merely a singular aspect of the law (as argued by some proponents who see a tripartite division).<sup>15</sup> In rendering the Mosaic Law inoperative, this allowed for the believers in Christ to be united, as Paul says in (vs.15), into one body (*two into one new man*). The result is clearly twofold (a) the one new man (unifying Jews and Gentiles into one body), and (b) the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles to God.

In (vs.16) we see that Jews and Gentiles are brought into a singular entity (the one body). Gentiles don’t become spiritual Jews, and Jews don’t become any sort of Gentile. The Gentiles and Jews are brought

<sup>14</sup> Hoehner, 371.

<sup>15</sup> Hoehner, 376.

together into a new body (the body of Christ). This entity came into being on Pentecost. Jesus claimed that he would build his church and through Spirit Baptism the believer is brought into union with Christ and union in the body. The hostility is completely removed by Christ's cross work and through his work Gentiles and Jews have peace now found in Messiah.

In (vs.17) an announcement of peace is made. Two aspects of peace are seen here (a) one with Jews and Gentiles, (b) another with God. Both Jews and Gentiles needed peace not only with each other, but ultimately with God. Jesus being our peace eliminated the hostility that God saw in us as those that were rebels against him. Both those far and near have heard the message (i.e., the good news of Jesus Christ). Thus, a new entity is born, the church, joined together by Christ and the work of the Spirit (vs.18).

Hoehner rightly states, “Clearly, this new union replaces the old enmity. Before conversion they were Jews and Gentiles, and after conversion they are one new person in Christ, called the Christians. It is through Christ’s death that both are brought together in one body (v. 16) and one Spirit (v. 18).”<sup>16</sup>

**19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, is growing into a holy sanctuary in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.** (19 Ἄρα οὖν οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι, ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συνπολῖται τῶν ἀγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ Θεοῦ, 20 ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν, ὃντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ 21 ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογούμενη αὐξεῖ εἰς ναὸν ἄγιον ἐν Κυρίῳ, 22 ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν Πνεύματι.)

Paul now shifts in (vs.19) to a closing thought based upon what had come before with the conjunctions “So then” (Ἄρα οὖν). Based upon this new union in Christ, there are consequences that follow. Because Gentiles have now been brought near (as opposed to being far from God relationally), they are no longer strangers and aliens (οὐκέτι), but are fellow citizens of the saints and of the household of God. This new place given to the Gentile is one of a true citizenship, not being brought into the old commonwealth/citizenship of Israel, but into a glorious new and lasting citizenship found in heaven (Phi. 3:20).<sup>17</sup> Paul, in Ephesians 3:6 highlights this glorious truth further “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” Gentiles are now fellow members of the body (the church), heirs according to the promise, and true partakers now. They have finally become partakers in a glorious future, because of their saviour and Messiah, Jesus Christ.

In (vs.20) this new entity (i.e., the church) was built upon the foundation which consists of two entities (*apostles and prophets*). Hoehner remarks regarding the term apostle (ἀποστόλων),

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<sup>16</sup> Hoehner, 390.

<sup>17</sup> In defence of this statement, Gerald Peterman says, “This does not mean that the Gentiles become part of the “commonwealth of Israel” (cf. 2:12) but rather that Jews and gentiles now share a heavenly citizenship in the Church (Phi 3:20).” Gerald Peterman, *Ephesians in the Moody Bible Commentary*, (Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2014), 1850. Edward R Roustio, likewise agrees, “Having been born into the family of God, with citizenship in heaven (Phil 3:20).” Edward R Roustio, *Ephesians in the King James Version Bible Commentary*, (Thomas Nelson Inc., Nashville Tennessee, 2005), 1567. Robert L. Saucy says, “This new citizenship, however, as we have seen, is in a new place involving a change for both Gentiles and Israel, those far and those near. Because neither this passage nor any other in the New Testament identifies the Christian community or the body of Christ as a “new Israel,” it seems doubtful that Paul had such an identity in mind. It makes more sense to understand this new citizenship in accordance with his teaching elsewhere. Using a Greek term that is closely related to the words that are translated “commonwealth” (Eph 2:12) and “fellow citizens” (v. 19), Paul tells the believers at Philippi that their “citizenship is in heaven” (Phi 3:20).” Saucy, 160-161.

“An apostle is one who is sent out on a mission with fully delegated authority by his master Jesus Christ, as the original disciples whom Jesus selected were sent out to minister...three kinds of apostles in the NT have been mentioned: those who had been with Jesus in his ministry and had witnessed his resurrection (Acts 1:21-22), Paul who was born out of season (1 Cor 15:8-9), and those who received the gift of apostleship as mentioned in 4:11. The first two categories are to be regarded as offices, whereas the last as a spiritual gift to the church. In the present context Paul is most likely referring to all three categories.”<sup>18</sup>

The second term that must be unpacked is prophet (προφητῶν). Hoehner in his extensive analysis on the various viewpoints concludes that the best interpretation of “prophets” is the *NT prophets*. He states the following after surveying the various views,

“View (4) proposes that these are apostles and NT prophets. This is the most plausible view for the following reasons. First, the order of apostles before prophets suggests it. Second, the present context discusses God’s creation of the “new person” (v. 15), that is, the church, and this is completely distinct from the old order where the law caused hostility between Jews and Gentiles. Now with the law inoperative, the new person is built, not on prophets from the old order, but on the apostles and prophets of the new order. Third, the mystery of believing Jews and Gentiles incorporated into one body was hidden to former generations, which would include the OT prophets, but *now* is revealed to *Christ’s* holy apostles and prophets (3:5). The words in 3:5 are listed in the same order as the present verse, that is, apostles before the prophets. Fourth, Eph 4:11 states that the apostles and prophets were given to the church as foundational gifted people who were to prepare saints for ministry and to build up this new body, the church. Again, the apostles are mentioned before prophets in 4:11 as in the present verse. Also, since the apostles and prophets are given for the effective function of the new order, it is inconceivable that these refer to OT prophets. Fifth, since in this metaphor Christ is the cornerstone in the context of his suffering, the first stone of the foundation, it must refer to NT prophets who are a part of the foundation of this new work called the church. In conclusion then, the prophets mentioned here must be NT prophets who form the foundation along with the apostles.”<sup>19</sup>

The connection to the cornerstone (ἀκρογονιάτιον) draws the reader back to Isaiah 28:16 which says, “Therefore thus says Lord Yahweh, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed.” The Messiah was to be the cornerstone, he would be the foundation (the most important stone) in the building of the church. All other stones were to be in line with the Messiah.

In (vs.21) Paul continues the thought, that the whole building is being joined together, fitted together as living stones (1 Pet. 2:5) growing into a holy sanctuary in the Lord. The picture here would be one that the Ephesians would be quite familiar with. The temple imagery that surrounds Paul’s statements are quite clear. The temple growing here with individual stones was becoming a temple which the Lord would dwell. As Hoehner states, “The emphasis is not individual growth but corporate growth.”<sup>20</sup>

A brief side-note should be stated at this point. The statements here made by Paul should not be confused with him arguing that there is no future temple that will be built, merely because he uses temple imagery here. His argument relates to the corporate relationship of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, it does not negate previous prophecy that speaks of a coming temple where the Lord will dwell on earth. It must not be seen

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<sup>18</sup> Hoehner, 399.

<sup>19</sup> Hoehner, 403.

<sup>20</sup> Hoehner, 411.

as an either/or argument from Paul, as amillennialists often advocate, but both/and. It is true that the church is seen as a temple, but it is also true that there is a coming future temple.<sup>21</sup>

Moving to the last verse in the section (vs.22) Paul connects the previous thoughts made in his continuing sentence that in the Lord, Jews and Gentiles are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. This temple will become the new dwelling place where the Spirit will be. This is seen even more individually in 1 Cor. 6:19 where our own bodies are a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit.

Hoehner closes this section with the following observation,

“The relevance to the people of Ephesus is obvious. Before their conversion the Jews thought of God as dwelling in the temple made with hands. On the other hand, the Ephesians thought of the goddess Artemis as the one who dwelt in the renowned temple at Ephesus...These were two diametrically different views of who God was and where he resided. After conversion, both believing Jews and Gentiles must view God and his dwelling place in a drastically different way. They have been made one new person, growing into a holy temple. God’s abode is in this new creation. Before, both Jews and Gentiles could see the stone buildings in which their God or gods dwelt, but now the one true God is dwelling in them, the collective entity called the church. In 1:23 it is God who fills Christ with the fullness of moral excellence and power and Christ who fills the church. In the present context it is God in the person of the Holy Spirit who dwells in this corporate body made up of redeemed Jews and gentiles called the church.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Eze. 37:26-28, 40-48; Isa. 56:7, 60:13; Zec. 6:9-15, 14:20-21

<sup>22</sup> Hoehner, 415.