

The Gentile Mission and the Tabernacle of David

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Introduction

In an earlier article, “The Restoration of Israel”,¹ it was suggested that one reason for the Gentile Mission being brought forward in the purpose of God was to place ecclesias in the Diaspora to witness to the Jews who would be scattered as a consequence of the Jewish-Roman war of 66-73 CE. As it happened, Jews and Christians parted ways after the Apostolic Era and Christianity became something other than that which was intended.

In this article, we return to the topic of the Gentile Mission and why it happened; we are interested in an argument that sequences the Gentile Mission in the purpose of God and relates that mission to the outreach and conversion of the Gentiles in the messianic age—this argument is to be found in Acts 15:13-18.

Amos 9:11-12

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old... Amos 9:11 (KJV)

James² quotes Amos 9:11-12 in his argument. Scholars discuss the form of his quotation as it has aspects in common with both the LXX and the MT.³

¹ A. Perry, “The Restoration of Israel”, *CeJBI* 2/2 (2008).

² Scholars would normally not think of “James” here but rather Luke’s presentation of James; we will ignore this issue and consider James as the proponent.

³ For a comprehensive discussion see R. Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles” in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts* (ed., B. Witherington III; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 154-184 (156-170).

We will not discuss this question. We will first look at the text in the MT and then consider James' quotation in the light of that text.

There are four points to note about this text:

1) "In that day" is a common prophetic phrase to refer to that day in which God acts decisively on behalf of his people (e.g. Isa 28:5, 29:18, 30:23, 31:7).

2) The "tabernacle of David" (KJV) is a unique expression. H. A. Whittaker suggests that the expression refers to Hezekiah in his state of mortal sickness.¹ He avers that in the Amos text God promises that he would "raise" up Hezekiah in that day in which he acts to save his people from Assyria. He does not offer supporting texts for the equation, but with Amos describing the punishment of God upon Israel (Amos 9:1-10) and Assyria being the superpower of Amos' day, some action of God in relation to "David" rather than Samaria is implied. Other scholars take "tabernacle of David" to be a metaphor for the Davidic kingdom,² or the Davidic house, which God is then promising to raise up.³

Our claim is that the "tabernacle" (סככה) is a reference to Jerusalem. The RSV and NASB have "booth" which is better, as the underlying Hebrew is not the normal word for the Tabernacle. This word occurs in Isaiah,

And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. Isa 1:8 (RSV)

It will be for a booth by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain. Isa 4:6 (RSV revised)

The reference to Jerusalem is clear: the city was a booth in a vineyard which the Assyrians were going to strip, but it would instead become a booth from

¹ H. A. Whittaker, *Acts* (Cannock: Biblia, 1985), 226. In contrast, Hezekiah uses the word "tent" (אהל) of himself (Isa 38:12).

² J. L. Mays, *Amos* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1969), 164.

³ J. A. Soggin, *The Prophet Amos* (London: SCM Press, 1987), 147.

the heat of the Assyrian onslaught. In this sense, we propose that the better translation would be “shelter of David”.

Amos has Yahweh saying that “in that day” he would “raise” up the shelter that was Jerusalem. The same terminology of “raising” is used of the restoration of the cities of Judah in Isa 61:4: “And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations” (KJV).

While Jerusalem was not overrun during the siege of 701 the city was partly reduced to ruins as a result of building outer defensive walls from houses inside the city, and the temple suffered damage by fire (Isa 22:5, 64:11).¹ Amos’ prophecy has partial application therefore at this time and a future application on James’ reading.

3) Amos refers to repairing the “breaches” which indicates the walls (cf. Isa 58:12), and “raising” walls that have “fallen” is the best sense (cf. Isa 30:13, Mic 7:11).

4) Finally, the statement concludes with the general assertion that Jerusalem will be built as in the days of old; here the normal word for the action of “building” is used (cf. Isa 61:6, 65:21-22).

The above points, (1)-(4), establish the primary application of Amos 9:11 to be a reference to the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the damage suffered during the Assyrian invasion. We can now consider the next verse.

That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this. Amos 9:12 (KJV)

This prophecy has its initial fulfillment in Hezekiah’s restoration of Judah.

5) After 701, Hezekiah waged a campaign of liberation in Edom against the nations who had been confederate with Assyria (Isa 34:1-15, 41:2, 41:25,

¹ We presume here an eighth century reading of Isaiah 40-66 contrary to scholarship.

59:16-18, 63:1-6). Amos refers to “they” and these are God’s people (less the sinners, Amos 9:10). God’s people would possess the survivors (remnant) from Hezekiah’s campaign in Edom.

6) God’s people will also “possess” those who are called by God’s name among the nations. This refers to those of the nations who responded to the good news of Assyria’s defeat and sought the God of Israel (Isa 4:1, 43:7, 62:2, 65:1). The “light to the Gentiles” in Hezekiah’s day brought about some response from the nations roundabout and such as responded were called by God’s name. These Gentiles became those upon whom God’s name was called, i.e. they belonged to him.¹ This is a startling assertion in Amos, but one familiar in Isaiah.

Points (1)-(6) establish a framework of understanding for Amos 9:11-12 that we can take into the NT. This is an important result because NT scholars have taken “tabernacle of David” to refer to either the restored Davidic kingdom of Israel,² or more popularly, the apostolic Christian community viewed as the “temple” of the future age.³ The resurrected Jesus has also been proposed in a manner which would support Whittaker’s application of Amos originally to Hezekiah.⁴

The suggestions of “tabernacle”, “temple” or “kingdom” are unlikely because the Hebrew for “shelter” (סכה) is never used of these entities in the OT.⁵

¹ Isa 63:19 expresses the point of view of those returning to Zion in the aftermath of 701; they were those “called by God’s name”.

² J. D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Peterborough: Epworth, 1996), 203.

³ R. Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles” in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts* (ed., B. Witherington III; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 154-184 (165-166); J. Bradley Chance, *Jerusalem, the Temple, and the New Age in Luke-Acts* (Marcon: Mercer University Press, 1988), 35-41.

⁴ E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 448; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* (NSBT 17; Leicester: Apollos, 2004), 232-238.

⁵ Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 236, offers 2 Sam 11:11 for the use of סכה for the “tabernacle”, but the “shelters” of this text do not include the tabernacle.

The word carries the overtone of something like a shelter, and this idea fits the role of Jerusalem facing the onslaught of the Assyrian storm. A related theme from the time is the notion a hiding place (Isa 2:19; 28:17, cf. 32:2).

NT scholars have interpreted “tabernacle of David” to be the temple-community or the restored kingdom of Israel for several reasons. OT scholars¹ do not relate Amos’ prophecy to the eighth century and so miss the Jerusalem connections with Isaiah. NT scholars usually rely on consensus views of OT scholars to tell them what to think about the OT. Furthermore, they usually reference the LXX treatment of Amos which uses a broader word meaning “tent” (σκηνή) and this is a word which is used for the temple. Finally, NT scholars are more comfortable looking for applications of prophecy to the church. We will now explore the use of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15.

Acts 15:13-18

James “answers” points that have been raised by the participants at the council, but we do not have their contribution recorded. His first point echoes the account of the exodus in his description that “God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name”. This action resonates with the language of “visitation” in which God brought the children of Israel out of the Gentiles, i.e. Egypt (e.g. Exod 3:16, Acts 7:23). James’ point is that God has also visited the Gentiles in their day to take out a people for his name. This “visit” has been recorded in Acts in the Cornelius episode; this visit is to be distinguished from the “visit” of God to the Jews represented in the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 1:68, 78). James says that Peter has explained how God first visited the Gentiles and given that this happened with Cornelius, Peter is the obvious one to have given this explanation.

Acts 15:16

James says that the prophets agree with his understanding of the Gentile mission which he has described as a visitation in v. 15, and he cites Amos 9:11-12 in a form that does not exactly correspond to the MT. Sidelining this

¹ Mays, *Amos*, 164; Soggin, *Amos*, 147.

issue for the moment, when we come to Acts 15:16, the key question is: how does Amos fit James' argument?

After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up... Acts 15:16 (KJV)

James uses the ordinary Greek for "tent" (σκηνή) which the LXX uses for the MT "shelter" in Amos 9:11. The semantic range of σκηνή includes tents, the Tabernacle, as well as shelters. It serves for סוכה in "feast of booths" (Lev 23:34, 42, 43; it is used for the "pavilions" of the battlefield (1 Kgs 20:12); it is used for Jerusalem as a "booth" in Isa 1:8; and it is used for Jonah's shelter (Jon 4:5). There is therefore no reason *not* to infer that James saw in the "σκηνή of David" the same reference as we find in the Hebrew original.¹

The most important crux for interpreting James' quotation of Amos is: when does God return? Is James saying God *has* returned in his day and is now building the shelter of David, or is he stating that God will return and build the shelter of David? Scholars who see the "tabernacle" of David as the Christian community see God's return in James' day; scholars who see the return of God as future, see the "tabernacle" of David in terms of a restoration of Israel.

James says "after this" and this picks up on a "first" happening. "After this" or better, "after these things", does not come from Amos 9:11 which has instead "in that day". It may be redundant, but Luke does not elsewhere treat his scriptural quotes and their composite nature in a redundant way. He removes an "after this" from Joel 2:28 when he quotes this text in Acts 2.² In James' flow of argument, the "this" after which God will return is the mission to the Gentiles. James is saying that *after this* God would build again

¹ *Contra* Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 236, who is misled by usage of σκηνή elsewhere in Acts and the NT which refers to the Tabernacle.

² He drops "after these things" and has instead "in the last days" from Isa 2:2.

the shelter of David. In terms of Amos 9:11, this means that Jerusalem will be built *after* the mission to the Gentiles and this is a significant claim.

The argument is tightly knit around the idea of a first visit and a second visit. Having asserted that God *has* visited the Gentiles, James then asserts that God will *return* and build Jerusalem. Such an assertion by James is consistent with Jesus' prophecy that Jerusalem would be destroyed "until the times of the Gentiles" were fulfilled (Luke 21:24). Once these times were fulfilled, Jerusalem would no longer be trodden down and by implication—built.

However, this does not explain why James would use Amos 9:11-12 in connection with a point about God visiting the Gentiles. Why would he want to say at this point that God would return and build Jerusalem?

There are lexical links between Acts 15:16-17 and Hos 3:5 (LXX) which are worth noting as these pick up corresponding words in the Hebrew:¹

After these things the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days. Hos 3:5 (RSV revised)

This prophecy refers to Israel's exile and that time when she would return to David (Judah) and seek the Lord. James is combining fragments of Hos 3:5 with his quotation of Amos for a purpose. There is rhetorical contrast between James' assertion and Hosea: in Hosea, Israel "return" "after these things" and "seek the Lord"; in Acts, God returns and builds the shelter of David and the Gentiles seek the Lord.

James has also added "I will return" to the Amos quotation. This assertion has several possible sources in the OT.

a) Zech 8:3 states "I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem".¹ Zech 1:16 has, "Therefore thus saith the Lord: I will return to

¹ See Whittaker, *Acts*, 226; Bauckham, "James and the Gentiles", 163; Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 238.

Jerusalem with compassion; and my house shall be rebuilt in her”.² These two texts are obvious sources for James’ “I will return”.

b) Jer 12:15-16 is part of a prophecy about Israel’s pagan neighbours. God states, “I will return and have compassion on them...then shall they be built in the midst of my people” (KJV).³ This connection seems inappropriate and against the grain of Amos 9:11-12. In Amos it is Jerusalem that is built; here in Jeremiah it is a building of those who believe of the nations.⁴

c) Num 10:36 sees the children of Israel invoking the Lord to return to the tabernacle.⁵ This shares a motif of return but the setting is not Zion and a strange bedfellow for Amos 9:11-12.

d) Isa 63:17-19 shares with Acts the idea of God “returning”,⁶ and it is the “sanctuary” to which he is asked to return after it has been trodden down. The “sanctuary” here is “the land” considered to be God’s sanctuary (Exod 15:17). Elsewhere “treading” is used to describe the effects of an enemy upon a people (Isa 14:19, 25; 63:6). This prophecy therefore has a broader scope than Amos.

The above options, (a)-(d), can be whittled down to (a). Zech 1:16 and 8:3 have the necessary “return” to Zion, although Zechariah has a focus on the temple and this might suggest that the “tabernacle” of David in Acts is to be

¹ Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles”, 163.

² Whittaker, *Acts*, 226.

³ Bauckham, “James and the Gentiles”, 164; Whittaker, *Acts*, 226.

⁴ Bauckham is misled by the Gentile conversion theme of Jer 12:15-16 which is present in Acts 15:14, 17, but not Acts 15:16, “James and the Gentiles”, 164. Beale also makes this mistake, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 238-239. However, even if Beale and Bauckham are misled to Jeremiah 12 by “I will return” in Acts, they do show that Jer 12:15-16 is relevant background to the prohibitions laid upon the Gentiles in the Jerusalem Council decision of Acts 15.

⁵ Whittaker, *Acts*, 226.

⁶ Whittaker, *Acts*, 226.

taken as a reference to the future temple rather than Jerusalem as it is in Amos.

More importantly, however, we can say that as Zechariah is concerned with a return to Jerusalem and a rebuilding of the temple; James' argument is not saying that God *has* "returned" and is building the "tabernacle" of David in the form of the Christian community or in the person of Christ. At James' point in time, Jerusalem has yet to be destroyed.

Further details support this line of interpretation.

After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up... Acts 15:16 (KJV)

In that day will I raise up the shelter of David that is fallen, and I will wall up its breaches; and I will raise up its ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old... Amos 9:11 (KJV revised)

In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and I will rebuild the ruins of it, and I will raise up the parts thereof that have been broken down, and I will build it up as in the ancient days... Amos 9:11 (LXX)

In the next part of the quote, there is stated "I will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down". This interprets the MT, "I will *raise up* the shelter of David which is fallen down". Acts also differs here from the LXX, as the LXX has "raise up", although both are reasonable treatments of the Hebrew. To understand why Acts should use "build" for "raise", an understanding of translation issues surrounding metaphor is needed. James is *bringing out* the building aspect of the metaphor of "raise up" whereas the LXX is retaining the metaphor; both approaches to metaphor are legitimate.

James' quote from Amos then states "I will build again the ruins", and the "ruins" are the "fallen down sections" (wall breaches). This corresponds to "I will wall up its breaches, and raise up its ruins" of the MT. Again Acts is different to the LXX preferring "build" whereas the LXX retains "raise".

Lastly, James' quote states "I will set it up", which varies "I will build it" from the MT, a variation not shared by the LXX, which translates the Hebrew as "I will build it".

The focus of the quote and the source in Amos is about the city of Jerusalem. The reference to "walling up" and "breaches" could refer to repair work on a city wall or a public buildings like a temple (e.g. 2 Kgs 12:13, Hos 2:8), but the reference to the "tabernacle/booth/shelter" of David has a clear link to Jerusalem in Isaiah. Bauckham has not noted these connections and hence asserts that "the reference is to the restoration of a *building*".¹ He is right however to exclude other interpretations that make the "tabernacle/booth/shelter" a metaphor for the Davidic throne, the Davidic ruler or the Davidic kingdom. All these suggestions overlook the "tabernacle/booth/shelter" motif in Isaiah.

We have noted that the NT quotation of Amos 9:11 uses "build" for the MT "raise". This variation uses a common word for "build" which resonates with texts about the building of Jerusalem— Ezra 4:13, Neh 2:5, Dan 9:27. This resonance may explain the choice of "build" for "raise" in James' citation, and direct the reader to interpret the "tabernacle" of David as a reference to Jerusalem rather than the eschatological temple.

James' citation omits the reference to "walling up the breaches" and the reference to the "days of old". The reason for the truncation is a matter of speculation. Bauckham suggests that a contrast is indicated by the omission of the "days of old" so that in our interpretation James would be indicating that the rebuilding of Jerusalem would be different from that in days of old. Similarly, the absence of "walling up the breaches" could show that this detail of the rebuilding of Jerusalem will not apply in the future age.

Acts 15:17

The citation of Amos in Acts 15:17 shares more with the LXX than the previous verse, but the LXX diverges notably from the MT in its translation of Amos 9:12.

¹ "James and the Gentiles", 157.

That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this. Amos 9:12 (KJV)

...that the remnant of men, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek *me*, saith the Lord who does all these things. Amos 9:12 (LXX)

That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Acts 15:17 (KJV)

The differences between the MT and the LXX have been extensively discussed. Whittaker postulates that the MT is corrupt and favours the LXX as an accurate indicator of the original Hebrew.¹ Scholars generally take Luke to be citing the LXX and ignore the MT as an influence on Luke's record at this point.² Our proposal is that James sees a type in "the remnant of Edom" which suggests to him "the remnant of men". There are two points to distinguish:

1) Superficially, the type might be suggested by the fact that the Hebrew for "Edom" is אֶדוֹם and for "men" is אָדָם, which is a pun. More importantly, a type would be suggested by James' reading of Isaiah and the role that Edom played among "the nations" that were allied to Assyria (mankind/men). The campaign against Edom after 701 was one of liberation of those of Judah who had been taken captive by the Assyrian confederacy. Their liberation produced a response of "seeking after the Lord".

Thus, James sees in Edom a type of those men who would bring about the scattering of Israel in his day. God will return and rebuild Jerusalem so that the survivors of such men would seek the Lord.

¹ *Acts*, 226.

² For instance, Haenchen, *Acts*, 448, "The Hebrew text would be useless for James' argument, and would even contradict it".

2) The defeat of Assyria in 701 (and then Edom) was the basis of the “good news” (gospel) to the nations roundabout. Some of the people in these nations responded and were called by God’s name at this time, i.e. they became God’s possession. Those of the Gentile nations who responded at that time were called by God’s name *as Gentiles* and not as proselytes to Israel.

Thus, James sees in the defeat of God’s enemies in 701 a type of the good news of Jesus’ victory over death which was the basis of the apostles’ Gentile mission.

James is citing Amos 9:12 by way of a typological reading, and this accounts for the variation on the MT. His reading is similar to that of the LXX, but we do not need to hypothesize on why this is the case. The most common suggestion by scholars is that Luke is quoting the LXX, but even if this is the case, we still have to explain the relationship of the varied language in Acts to the MT.¹ We might say there is no relationship and the MT is corrupt; we have provided the alternative explanation that James is bringing out a typological reading from the Hebrew.

James adds the object of what men seek to his citation, viz., the Lord. Bauckham offers Zech 8:22 as a complimentary text that may have prompted James to add “the Lord” as the object of “seek”.²

The end of Acts 15:17 is different in the KJV, RSV and NASB, and this reflects issues in the NT Greek text. For our purposes, we will follow the RSV of Acts 15:18 which quotes Isa 45:21,

¹ There is conceptual confusion in the idea that the holy Spirit through Luke quotes the LXX. If I quote from the standard English edition of Aristotle by Barnes, I am not quoting Barnes; I am quoting Aristotle even though he never wrote in English. Even if Luke uses the LXX of Amos, it is the Hebrew of Amos that is quoted by the holy Spirit, as Amos never wrote in Greek. We always need to think of how a NT quote of an OT prophet matches the MT.

² “James and the Gentiles”, 157.

...says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old. Acts 15:18 (RSV)

Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Isa 45:21 (RSV)

This allusion to Isaiah fits with Amos 9:11-12 because it comes from a prophecy (Isa 45:20-21) which concerns the survivors or remnant of men who are escaped of the nations.

The Gentile Mission

The relevance of James' quotation to the council deliberations of Acts 15 can now be described. The council was not debating the legitimacy of the mission to the Gentiles; it was debating whether they should become proselytes and be circumcised. This would be a move to make them Jewish rather than Gentile. Bauckham notes¹ that Amos 9:12 has the Gentiles belonging to Yahweh *as Gentiles* rather than proselytes, and this is the main thrust of James' citation.

However, there is a suppressed premise in this explanation not noted by Bauckham. The argument made by James is as follows:

God did at first visit the Gentiles, but it is also said that after this he will return and build Jerusalem so that the residue of men might seek the Lord and all the Gentiles.

The suppressed premise here is: the Gentiles being visited through the apostolic ministry *belong* to those Gentiles who would go up to Jerusalem to worship in the kingdom. The explicit premise is: Gentiles go up to Jerusalem *as Gentiles*, not as proselytes. James' conclusion from these two premises is that we should not circumcise Gentiles now.

¹ "James and the Gentiles", 169.

Conclusion

In this article we have presented a further reason for the Gentile mission. In an earlier article, “The Restoration of Israel”,¹ we suggested that one reason for the Gentile Mission being brought forward in the purpose of God was to place ecclesias in the Diaspora to witness to the Jews who would be scattered as a consequence of the Jewish-Roman war of 66-73 CE. We can add to this reason the second reason:

*God sought to call out the Gentiles before the rebuilding of Jerusalem **so that there would be** Gentiles to go up to Jerusalem to worship as Gentiles in the messianic age.*

This does not mean that when the kingdom is established, no more of the nations will go up to Jerusalem; it is just that the apostles’ mission to the Gentiles is a foreshadowing of this greater time.

END

¹ A. Perry, “The Restoration of Israel”, *CeJBI* 2/2 (2008).