

# **The Davidic Promise And The Inclusion Of The Gentiles (Amos 9:9-15 And Acts 15:13-18): A Test Passage For Theological Systems**

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

As published in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Volume 20:2, Page 97

The Evangelical Theological Society, June, 1977

It is virtually impossible to find a more appropriate set of canonical texts to test such a vast array of burning questions now posed in the whole curriculum of divinity than the two selected as a basis for this paper. The areas of debate are familiar by now: What is the relationship of the OT to the NT? What exegetical method(s) does/do the NT quotations of the OT employ, especially in argumentation that seeks OT support? What are the elements of continuity and/or discontinuity between Israel and the Church—or, to put it another way: Who are the “people of God” and what is the “kingdom of God”? Did the prophets envisage the Church or even the salvation of Gentiles during the Church age in their writings? Is there a single master plan or divine program involving eschatological completion for both Testaments?

## **I. Introduction**

“No small dissension” on these issues still remains within the body of Christ long after some of the same questions were tackled by the Jerusalem council. The only difference is that the debate now centers around one thing that apparently was especially clear in that day—namely, the significance and meaning of the OT quotation used by James to resolve the issue under debate. But what was it in that passage that settled the controversy? Did James claim that the mission to the Gentiles, dare we even say to the Christian Church, was part of the divine revelation to Amos—in any form whatever? And did James thereby also indicate that a fulfillment of Amos’ prophecy had come in the day of the apostles?

### *A. Areas of Tension*

Erich Sauer succinctly summarized the principal differences in the interpretation of the Amos and Acts passages. It was his judgment that whenever the subject of the Davidic kingship of Messiah’s kingdom is raised, especially as it relates to the Gentiles, three areas of tension emerge: (1) the *time* of the kingdom’s commencement (whether it was at the ascension and Pentecost, or at the future epiphany and parousia); (2) the *form* of this rule (whether it was solely inward and spiritual, or external, visible and historical-political); and (3) the *extent* of this kingdom (whether it was over a spiritual body such as the Christian Church, or a political body such as national Israel and other lands and peoples).<sup>1</sup> The vested interests in these questions and their answers are well known.

### *B. The Significance of Acts 15:13-18*

The *Scofield Reference Bible*, for example, noted that “dispensationally, this [Acts 15:13–18] is the most important passage in the N.T.” and “the verses which follow in Amos describe the final regathering of Israel, which the other prophets invariably connect with the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant.”<sup>2</sup> O. T. Allis, however, affirmed “that James declares expressly that Peter’s

---

1. E. Sauer, *From Eternity to Eternity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 185 ff.

2. *Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1343. On p. 1169, however, Scofield does not include it, saying that “the pivotal chapters, taking prophecy as a whole, are Deut. xxviii, xxix, xxx; Psa. ii; Dan. ii,

experience at Caesarea, which he speaks of as God's visiting 'the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name,' was in accord with the burden of prophecy as a whole, and quotes freely from Amos in proof of it."<sup>3</sup> Which is correct? Must we choose between a solely nationalistic and a solely spiritual interpretation? Are these the only options available?

For our part, each of Sauer's three questions on the *time*, *form*, and *extent* of the kingdom of Messiah already have had a long history of Biblical revelation that antedated the time of James and Amos. In fact, the presence of these features can be noted in the Biblical text prior to the blessing of David; yet each is part of that theology that "informs" the Amos text, and thus they are part of the background of our concern in this paper. Such an "informing theology"<sup>4</sup> can be seen from both the subject matter considered and especially from the specialized vocabulary that was reiterated in Amos 9:11-12. The former may be quickly summarized in accordance with the historical canons of Biblical theology as they develop from the pre-patriarchal era to Davidic times.

### C. Biblical Theology

Let it be observed from the start that Genesis 1-11 can hardly be put down as a nationalist tract; indeed, the scope of the seventy nations listed in Genesis 10, when taken with the promise of Gen 12:3 that in Abraham's seed "all the nations of the earth [viz, those just listed in Genesis 10] shall be blessed," constitutes the original missionary mandate itself. The redemptive plan of God from the beginning, then, was to provide a salvation as universal in scope as was the number of the families on the earth. Accordingly, the *object* and *content* of the pre-patriarchal person's faith was the same as that of the post-Abrahamic or Davidic promise era: It was the man ("seed") of promise and his work (e.g., a "dwelling," a "great name," a "land," a "blessing") as witnessed by Gen 3:15; 9:27; 12:1-3. And part of that *content* Paul equated with the "gospel"—the same<sup>5</sup> gospel Paul preached to the Gentiles: "In you shall all the nations be blessed" (Gal 3:8); or the Mosaic (!) word of Deut 30:10-14, "the word of faith which we preach" (Rom 10:6-8); or the "gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures" (Rom 1:1-6). Likewise, Heb 3:17-4:2 clearly equates the "gospel" which "came to us" (= believers of the first century and hence ourselves as well) as the *same* one that came to those unbelieving

---

vii."

3. :O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945) 147.

4. See for a provisional definition my article, "The Present Status of OT Studies," *JETS* 18 (1975) 69-79, esp. 73-74.

5. C. Welch, *Dispensational Truth* (London: n. d.) 36 says, "Not only are there observable in Scripture various dispensations and purposes, but there are also in relation to these varying administrations *varying Gospels* .... There is a message regarding the earth and the future blessings of the earth; this is the gospel of the kingdom. There is a message of free salvation...; this is the gospel of grace .... Let us not join together that which God has kept distinct" {italics ours}.

Jews of the forty years of wanderings, “whose carcasses fell in the wilderness.” What could be clearer?

Consequently, we conclude that the *extent* of that kingdom had already in its earliest design embraced the steady absorption of Gentiles as well as Jews. Furthermore, there were numerous illustrations of this historical inclusion of the Gentiles. Witness the presence of Melchizedek, Jethro, Zipporah, Balaam, Rahab, Ruth and possibly the Gib-eonites, the Rechabites, the Ninevites and the entire books (e.g., Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum), or sections of books (e.g., prophecies to the nations in Isa 13–23, Jer 45–51, Ezek 25–32, Amos 1–2), addressed to Gentiles. What is more, many of the specific evangelistic appeals in the OT—e. g., those given through the plagues of Egypt—were so “that the Egyptians (or Pharaoh) might believe (or know) that I am the LORD” (Exod 7:5; 8:10, 19, 20; 9:16, 20, 30; 14:4, 18).

Nevertheless even if such *content* and *extent* be agreed upon, there still remains the problem of matching such inclusions and extensions with the messianic kingdom promised to David. What was or will be the *time* of its realization? What *form* will this rule take? And did the prophets predict the Church in any shape or form? Or was this Gentile body of believers a parenthesis and gap in the plan of God deliberately left in mystery form, until the political rule of God was rejected (Matthew 13) and the spiritual kingdom was unveiled? And did God predict a future for Israel that coincided with his spiritual kingdom in any shape or form? Or have the Israelites’ promises been made over to a new Israel, the Church, by some hermeneutical method such as “spiritualizing”?

#### *D. Epangelical Theology*

Recently, this writer has affirmed that a rapprochement can be had between the heretofore opposite positions assumed by dispensationalists and covenantal theologians. Such a solution he calls “promise theology” or “epangelicalism.” Its unifying principle is not soteriological (covenant theology) or doxological (recent dispensational theology);<sup>6</sup> it is, rather, the single, inclusive, everlasting plan of God announced and continuously expanded. It is what the NT writers refer to as “the promise” (hence the *epangel*), but what the OT refers to under a constellation of terms such as “blessing,” “oath” and “word”<sup>7</sup> and/or a set of formulas such as the ubiquitous tripartite formula: “I will be your God, you shall be my people, and I will dwell in the midst of you.”<sup>8</sup> Such a center for OT and NT theology, we allege, is supplied inductively from the text; it is not a grid laid over the Testaments. Its growth and development (even as the perfect Christ was “made perfect”) is overtly supplemented by the historic progress of revelation that consciously connects each new addition to the existing core ideas by means of explicit citation and allusion to those earlier phrases, clauses and words that began to assume a technical

---

6. C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965) 102.

7. See W. C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31–34,” *JETS* 15 (1972) 12 nn. 3–8.

8. *Ibid.*, n. 10.

status in each new supplement to the doctrine. This promise spoke of one people—a “people of God,” a “people for his possession.” It also spoke of a single purpose—the “blessing” of God for the “kingdom of God.” The “seed” of God was always collective, never plural; yet it embraced a physical and spiritual seed for Abraham under the one seed, Christ himself. Likewise, its program was one—a veritable “charter for humanity” (tôrat hā’ādām, 2 Sam 7:19b = I Chr 17:17).<sup>9</sup> It is our earnest contention that what David was given in his kingship and kingdom was nothing less than an updated and supplemented Edenic and Abrahamic promise which at once embraced “all the nations of the earth”—i.e., “humanity”—if they would but believe in that Man of promise, the “Seed.” God’s intention was to bless the whole earth through David. Nonetheless, he would not thereby jettison his promises to Israel as a nation. His single program was more complex and comprehensive than our either/or mentality.

But again the questions persist: When? And in what form? And did such a “charter” incorporate the believing Church? Did the prophets ever speak to this question?

Evidently, James thought they had! His appeal for support on this point to Amos 9:11 promptly settled the Jerusalem council debate! Could it do the same to effect a similar peace in the latter part of the twentieth century?

It is truly amazing how little hard exegetical and contextual work has been done on these key passages. Even the journal literature on these texts of Amos 9 and Acts 15 is extremely rare. Accordingly, it must first be noted that the context of Amos had just predicted a separation of the evil from the good in the *nation* of Israel and the destruction of the wicked (Amos 9:8–9). The survivors and their descendants would one day experience a divine restoration of the dilapidated condition of that grand old house (= dynasty) of David. So extensive would this rebuilding be that it would affect all nations and all nature as well! But the text must be examined more minutely.

## II. Key Exegetical Issues In Amos 9:11ff.

### A. *The Fallen Hut of David*

The subject of Amos 9:11, the present condition of David’s sukkâ, the “booth” or “hut,” is not to be equated with the Mosaic “tabernacle,” the miškân, or the messianic “Branch,” the sôkâ;<sup>10</sup> rather, it normally signifies the hastily constructed shelters made of branches for the “feast of tabernacles” (Lev 23:40, 42; Deut 16:13). Here, however, it stands for the dynasty of David, which is normally styled “the house of David” (2 Sam 7:5, 11). But this dynasty with all its glorious promises of blessing will shortly be in a collapsed state with “breaches” and “ruins” in

---

9. See the arguments of this writer in “The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity,” in *The Law and the Prophets: OT Studies Prepared in Honor of O. T. Allis* (ed. J. H. Skilton: Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974) 310-318.

10. L. H. Silberman, “A Note on 4Q Florilegium,” *JBL* 78 (1959) 158-159.

it.<sup>11</sup> The Hebrew active participle stresses either its *present* state (“falling”) or its *impending* state (“about to fall”). Thus the house of David would suffer, but God promises to raise it from its dilapidated condition, which raising up is described in the three following clauses.

### *B. The Interchange of Suffixes*

The suffixes on three words in v 11 are of special interest for the theology of the passage. If the Masoretic text is correct (and there is no reason to suspect it other than modern harmonistic motivations to level out the text), then the suffixes of the phrase “breaches *thereof*” (feminine plural), “*his* ruins” (masculine singular) and “rebuilt *it*” (feminine singular) take on major significance for the interpretation of this passage.

Keil is certain that “the plural suffix (‘breaches *thereof*,’ *piršêhen*) can only be explained from the fact that *sukkâh* actually refers to the kingdom of God, which was divided into two kingdoms (‘these kingdoms,’ ch. vi. 2).”<sup>12</sup> God would “wall up their rents.” Thus, even before Ezek 37:15–28 pictured the unification of the ten northern tribes with the two southern ones, Amos had anticipated him in the eighth century. Clearly the writer’s intention had a distinctly nationalistic element as its referent.

The masculine singular suffix (“his ruins,” *hârisôtâyw*) must refer to none other than David himself and not to the “hut” (which is feminine). Consequently, under that new-coming-David (= Christ) the destroyed house would rise from the ashes of “destruction.”<sup>13</sup> But when? And how? And for whom? One thing was certain: What had affected the nation had also for the moment affected the Davidic person himself.

Only after these two acts of reconstruction are noticed does the third clause about “rebuilding it” (*bÿnîtîha*) appear. It may well be, as Keil contends, that *bânâ* here means “to finish building, to carry on, enlarge, and beautify the building.”<sup>14</sup> Naturally, the feminine suffix refers to the “fallen hut.” But it is most important to notice also the phrase that complete this clause: “as it was in days of old.” Here is one of the keys to the passage, for it points back to the promise of 2 Sam 7:11, 12, 16 where God had promised that he would raise up David’s seed after him and give him a throne and a dynasty that would endure forever. Accordingly we note that the resurrecting of the dilapidated Davidic fortunes would involve a *kingdom*, a *seed*, and a *dynasty*. Likewise, the

11. E. Henderson, *The Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets* (Boston: 1960) 179-180 notes that “when the prosperity of that family is spoken of, the more dignified phrase *bêt David*, ‘the house of David,’ is employed. See II Sam. iii. 1; I Kings xi.38; Is. vii.2, 13. *’ôhel Davîd*, ‘the tent, or tabernacle, of David,’ Is xvi.5 would seem to express an intermediate state of things.”

12. C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the OT: Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), I. 330.

13. For this meaning of *hârisâ*, cf. Isa 49:19.

14. Keil, *Commentary*, p. 330.

subject of the phrase in v 12, “in order that *they* might inherit the remnant,” is clearly the people. Therefore, it is decisively taught here: The kingdom, David, David’s house (dynasty), the people and the remnant are indissolubly linked together; one stands and falls with the other.<sup>15</sup> But who were the remnant these people would possess? And how was the possession to be accomplished?

### *C. Edom and Mankind*

For many, v 12 appears even more problematical than v 11—especially with its “offensive” reference to “the remnant of Edom.” However, the reference is not to be understood in a negative or retaliatory sense—i. e., as a punishment to Edom for one or more of its rivalries with Israel. On the contrary, “Edom” along with the other nations would be brought under that reign of the Davidic King who is to come—the Messiah. This “remnant” must also share in the covenant promise to David.

It was Gerhard Hasel<sup>16</sup> who pointed out that Amos employed the “remnant” theme in a threefold usage: (1) “... to refute the popular remnant expectation which claimed all of Israel as the remnant” [Amos 3:12; 4:1–3; 5:3; 6:9–10; 9:1–4, all of which were bleak descriptions of doom with little hope for Israel]; (2) “... to show there will indeed be a remnant *from* Israel” [Amos 5:4–6, 15, an eschatological sense]; and (3) “... to include also the ‘remnant of Edom’ among and with the neighboring nations as a recipient of the outstanding promise of the Davidic tradition” [Amos 9:12].

Edom alone is singled out because of her marked hostility toward the people of God. Their role was similar to that of the Amalekites, the earliest nation to represent the kingdom of men (Exod 17:8 fl.; Deut 25:17–19), which stood violently against the kingdom of God.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Edom’s representative role<sup>18</sup> is further stressed by the exegetical note in v 12, “and even all the nations/Gentiles who are called by my name.” Again, the point is not about David’s or Israel’s military subjugation of Edom or the Gentiles; rather, it is about their spiritual incorporation into the restored kingdom of David that is in view in Amos 9:12. Indeed, had not the promise of God to Abraham and David included a mediated “blessing” to all the Gentiles?

The verb “to take possession of” was likewise specially chosen. Balaam’s prophecy in Num 24:17–18 had predicted that a “star” and “scepter” would rise in Israel “to take possession of Edom... while Israel did valiantly.” This “One from Jacob would exercise dominion” over all.

---

15. E. W. Hengstenberg. *Christology of the OT* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970) 549 n. 3.

16. G. Hasel, *The Remnant* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, 1972) 393-394.

17. Note the pivotal text of Exod 15:18: “The Lord will reign for ever and ever,” with the arrangement of the two responses: (1) murmuring Israelites versus (2) fighting (Amalek) and believing (Jethro) Gentiles!

18. See the fine discussion and bibliography in M. H. Woudstra, “Edom and Israel in Ezekiel.” *Calvin Theological Journal* (1968) 21-35.

Can serious students of Scripture fail to observe the obvious Messianic reference to our Lord's first ("star") and second ("scepter" and "rule") coming? And are not the representatives of the kingdom of men present: Moab, Sheth, Edom, Amalek and Asshur? Yet does not Amos now deliberately add by divine revelation that God will by divine plan "take possession" of a "remnant" from all the nations—including even bitter Edom? And will they not be owned by Yahweh since they will "be called by [his] name"?

#### *D. Called by the Name of the Lord*

This phrase<sup>19</sup> no doubt, was the trigger thought that brought to the mind of James the words of Amos. He had just commented: "Symeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name" (Acts 15:14). This is what the prophets also agreed with, continued James, as he cited Amos 9:11–12 with the identical concept: "the Gentiles that are called by my name."

The usage of this phrase in the OT always placed each of the objects so designated under divine ownership. What God or man named, they owned and protected,<sup>20</sup> whether cities (2 Sam 12:28; Jer 25:29; Dan 9:18, 19), the temple (1 Kgs 8:43; Jer 7:10, 11, 14, 30; 32:34; 34:15), or men and women (Isa 4:1; Jer 14:9; 15:16; 2 Chr 7:14). When Israel walked by faith, Moses promised: "All peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD" (Deut 28:10). This constituted Israel as a "holy people of the Lord," for where the Lord placed his name, there was he "in the midst of [them]" (Jer 14:9). But when they refused to believe, they were "like those who [were] not called by thy name" (Isa 63:19). Hengstenberg observed, "One need only consider the inferior use of the phrase [in] Gen. 48:6 where [the phrase] 'over the name of their brothers shall they be called in mine inheritance' [was] the same as 'they shall be incorporated with their brothers, no one shall have an existence separate from the rest.'" <sup>21</sup> Consequently, the expression was, as Keil observed, practically the same as Joel 2:32 (3:5 Hebrew): "all who call upon the name of the LORD." In fact, that was the precise reference used by Peter on the day of Pentecost to inaugurate the era of the Spirit, the new covenant and the Church. Therefore we conclude that this phrase is the most crucial one in the whole passage so far. It definitely meant to teach that Gentiles will be included in some future reign of God. The only question remaining was when? Must that inclusion wait until the restoration of nature and the nation had taken place?

### **III. Key Exegetical Issues In Acts**

But our concerns must now probe more deeply into the context of the parallel passage in Acts. Immediately we are asked: Was the NT in the habit of changing the literal meaning of these prophecies involving Israel into something spiritual and *more* than was intended by the original

---

19. J. Morgenstern, "The Rest of the Nations," *JSS* 11 (1957) 225-231.

20. See the full study by W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "Name," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (ed. M. C. Tenney)(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), IV, 360–370.

21. E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology*, p. 550.

prophet's thought? Or did the NT writers preserve the literal references to Israel without finding a single prediction of the Church in the OT? Was the Church, then, a parenthesis in the plan of God as announced in the OT? Had all prophetic outlines of the future and divine eschaton skipped over her times? These issues are so serious that they have been a major factor in dividing equally devout Biblical scholars into dispensational or covenantal schools of thought.<sup>22</sup>

*A. The Time Words in Acts 15:15-16*

Two fine dispensational writers, Willard M. Aldrich and Allan Mac-Rae, have stressed the importance of the words "first" and "after this" for the dispensational argument.<sup>23</sup> "God first (prōton) visited the Gentiles" (v 14); "after this (meta tauta) [he] will return... and... rebuild the tent of David" (v 16). Thus the argument is that the visitation of the Gentiles came first, an event not explicitly noted by the prophets. A second visitation will come to a regathered national Israel when David's house is rebuilt, but the two events must not be confounded or united.

The problem with this analysis is that it must then be admitted that the OT citation had no direct bearing on the question at stake. Was the apostle, as Keil suggests, quoting from memory the introductory words which he inadvertently altered from tē hērnera ekeinē anastēsō ("in that day I will raise up") into meta tauta anastrepsō kai anoikodomēsō ("after these things I will return, and I will rebuild"), since the point he was making in the citation did not turn on this phrase but the one about "all nations [will be] called by my name"?<sup>24</sup> Perhaps anastēsō was recollected as anastrepsō—or was it instead deliberately introduced by James to clarify his point that everything the prophet Amos was saying was to take place *after* Christ had returned to the earth a second time? However, if the latter was the case, why was anastrepsō chosen? This would be the only

---

22. Obviously the issue here concerns only the identity of the "people of God"; only obliquely does it touch the question of the kingdom of God or program of God. Still, as both sides agree, it is a pivotal issue.

23. W. M. Aldrich, "The Interpretation of Acts 15:13-18," *BSac* 111 (1954) 317-323, esp. 320 ff.; A. MacRae, "The Scientific Approach to the OT," *BSac* 110 (1953) 309-320, esp. 311 ff. MacRae, however, appears to have vacillated in his opinion, for on p. 319 he argues that James used "after these things" to refer to the Amos context! (This article was reprinted in *Truth for Today* [Chicago: Moody, 1963]). After I had finished this paper, I also noticed two additional adherents of this view: C. Zimmerman, "To This Agree the Words of the Prophets," *Grace Journal* 4 (1963) 28-40; and the most definitive and careful work by J. E. Rosscup, *The Interpretation of Acts 15:13-18* (unpublished Th. D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1966).

24. Keil, *Commentary*, p. 334 n. 1. This principle is in full accord with an orthodox view of inerrancy as has been observed since Calvin's day.

use of that word to denote the second coming of Christ in the NT.<sup>25</sup> Aldrich<sup>26</sup> does cite the “great lexicographer Thayer” as one who so applied the “I will return” to the personal return of Messiah rather than to any emphatic form of “I will build *again*.” But will either of these alternatives fit here?

In our judgment, the meaning “again” appears unlikely since the Hebrew of Amos would have read ‘āšûb instead of the present ‘āqîm. Furthermore, the repeated Greek prefix ana on anoikodomēsō, “I will rebuild,” and anorthōsō, “I will raise up again,” easily made the “again” point apart from any borrowed semitism. Consequently the reference is not to the second coming, nor is it a built-up phrase about a “rebuilding *again*” of David’s house. Rather, v 14, kathōs prōton, “how first God visited the Gentiles,” is no doubt temporal with kathōs referring to an indirect question, as Robertson’s larger grammar suggests. The “first” was an historical fact and unrelated to the return of Christ.

But v 16 is a different story. Meta tauta, “after these things,” probably has reference to the Amos context which James consciously included in his citation; both the Hebrew *and* the LXX had clearly read “in that day”—i. e., in the messianic times—yet James purposely departed from both!<sup>27</sup> Why? The “things” James wanted to highlight were the predicted judgments that Amos had said were to fall on Israel, causing the outward and material collapse of the “house of David.” Beginning with Amos 7, God had depicted in five visions one judgment after another that would visit Israel, climaxing in a smiting and destruction of the temple itself (Amos 9:1 fl.). There would be no escape, dig or hide wherever one might. Indeed, God would sift the house of Israel in the sieve of the nations (Amos 9:9) with the result that they would be dispersed and shaken, yet not a small kernel of the true remnant would fall to the ground; they would be

The Davidic Promise And The Inclusion Of The Gentiles (Amos 9:9-15 And Acts 15:13-18):

25. C. E. Hayward, “A Study in Acts XV. 16–18,” *EvQ* 8 (1936) 162-166; see p. 165. He argues that the LXX translators, knowing the Hebrew idiom, tried to reproduce it in the sense of “again” as in Gen 26:18, etc. according to its transitive usage.

26. Aldrich, “Interpretation,” p. 322. Allis, *op. cit.*, p. 313 n. 10 argues that to “return and (do something)” is rendered “again” 49 times in the *KJV*: indeed, in v 9 of Amos 9. Furthermore, even Darby attached no meaning to the phrase as did Scofield.

27. It is only partially true that James’ text is “exactly identical” with that of the Qumran text of 4Q Florilegium according to J. de Waard, *A Comparative Study of the OT Text in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the NT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966) 25-26, because the phrase “after these things I will return” does not appear in 4QFlor or CD. Neither can this phrase be an allusion to Jer 12:15 as Nestle’s *Novum Testamenturn Graece* suggests (*ad loc.*, *in margine*), since the only word common to both is meta. The tauta is missing in LXX of Jer. and epistrepsō is common only to the D text of Acts. Rosscup, *Interpretation*, p. 148, chides Aldrich and Zimmerman for making “after these things” so strategic in their interpretations, for meta tauta, Rosscup observes, is also used by LXX of Joel 2:28 to translate MT ’aḥārê kēn.

preserved and delivered by the same Lord who shook the sieve. The same cannot be said for Israelite sinners, however, who claimed some type of magical exemption (Amos 9:10). Their doom was sure.

Now “after these things”—the destruction of the temple, the fact of the diaspora, and the end of Samaria—warned James, with an eye to the Amos context, God “would turn again” (anastrepsō) to re-establish the house of David. To obtain the dispensational view one must assume that the “first” of v 14 signified the “first [era]” (a clear interpolation) while the second reference was given a sequential meaning: “After this [gospel dispensation]”<sup>28</sup> God would “come again” and restore Israel. But on these grounds neither phrase is a literal, grammatical or natural interpretation of James. Dispensationalism has thereby yielded any hermeneutical edge it possessed by so arguing.

### *B. The Introductory Formula*

James summarized Peter’s testimony about the Gentile conversion of Cornelius by observing that “God had visited the Gentiles in order to take out (infinitive of purpose) of them a people for his name.” The English hardly conveys the surprising connection of the words “to take from the nations” (ethnōn—the word used, when a distinction is made, for heathen or Gentiles) “a people” (laos, a term for chosen people).<sup>29</sup> Even that great premillennial interpreter, Bengel, saw the sharpness of putting it in this fashion. He said: “The converts from among the Gentiles were [regarded] no less than Israel [as] the people of God”; yes, a transformation from being “heathen” to being “people”!

“With this fact” (kai toutō, neuter form) just stated (= the conversion of Gentiles), the prophets (plural) “agree... as it is written.” MacRae and Aldrich strenuously object to the exegesis that Amos had predicted that God would visit the Gentiles to call out a people for his name.<sup>30</sup> For one thing, they claimed the formula appears only here in Acts.

---

28. P. Mauro, “Building Again the Tabernacle of David,” *EvQ* 9 (1937) 398-413, esp. pp. 399-401. Rosscup, *Interpretation*, pp. 143-144: “By ‘these things’ he [Jesus] had reference to the ‘things’ of the total period of Jewish dispersion which Amos describes. He was not referring back particularly to the ‘things’ of Acts 15:14... [this] is attractive in that it avoids the necessity of leaning too heavily upon certain inconclusive arguments involving the [words] ‘first’ and ‘after’ of Acts 15:14, 16 .... The suggested connection between the ‘first’ and the ‘after’ is to some degree tenuous.” But Rosscup makes the “things” of Amos 9:9–10 equal to the *entire* period of the Jewish dispersion!

29. See the informative discussion by G. Bertram, “People and Peoples in the LXX,” *TDNT*, I,364-369.

30. MacRae, “Scientific,” p. 319; Aldrich, “Interpretation,” pp. 319 ff.

Indeed, this is the only time an OT quotation is introduced in Acts in this manner. But then, as Aldrich unintentionally pointed out, there was no set formula for doing so in Acts: He cited a dozen different formulae.

But did the formula only indicate a “harmony of principle”<sup>31</sup> but with no direct bearing on the question from the OT? Or, alternatively, did it give only “the gist of OT prophecy on the subject... [where James] is intentionally ‘spiritualizing’ and broadening Amos’s prophecy”?<sup>32</sup> Which is correct, the dispensational or covenant hermeneutic?

“Neither,” we answer. Both solutions miss opposite parts of the single truth. It was “the words” of the prophets that “were written” and “were in conformity with the fact” (toutō) just summarized. God had visited Gentiles, and Gentiles had become the “people” of God! The harmony was not an application of a principle, but an explicit argument naming “Gentiles” and carrying evidential force for Jews who were resisting the idea, but who knew and accepted the authority of the inscripturated word! Nor was this a “spiritualization” of either Israel or David which thereby preserved only the “gist” of the original thought. Such a view must adopt some form of *sensus plenior* hermeneutic wherein the prophets are alleged to have written better (= less) than they knew. But we urge a speedy consultation of I Pet 1:10 ff., where the prophets are represented as most assuredly knowing what they wrote, including: (1) the Messiah, (2) his death, (3) his glorious reign, (4) the sequential order of these two events, and (5) that they wrote not only for their day, but also for those of us in the Church. I Pet 1:12 explicitly affirms, “unto whom it was revealed, that not for themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you...”<sup>33</sup>

### *C. Rebuilding David’s Tent Which Has Fallen*

Obviously, then, God intended to receive Gentiles and set David’s name over them; but what had this to do with David’s fallen tent? And how does this solve the circumcision issue? Is the point merely that there is an analogy between the calling of Gentiles in the dispensation of the gospel with the gathering of Gentiles during the future dispensation of the kingdom? Or must national Israel be transmuted into the value of spiritual Israel, the Church, if any connection, is to be observed?

Again, our conclusion is: “Neither!” The former solution reads into the words “first” and “after this/these” two *eras*. This method leans too heavily, at the start, on what is believed to be the teaching of the analogy of faith. It divides Gentiles from Jews because of prior theological commitments. Such commitments are not unwise *if* they originate in a prior exegesis and develop along with the course of the history of revelation; but where they are first discerned in the NT

---

31. Aldrich’s word, *ibid*.

32. Hayward, “Study,” p. 163.

33. See our lengthy argument on this point in “The Eschatological Hermeneutics of ‘Epangelicalism’: Promise Theology,” *JETS* 13 (1970), esp. pp. 92-96.

and then subsequently used as a tool to exegete or circumscribe an OT text, the risks are high. Literal, grammatical, historical exegesis has thereby suffered a defeat, even if it is at the hands of its friends!

The alternative is not inviting either. It also uses the NT analogy-of-faith method from systematics, but with a different conclusion that emphasizes the unity of the Testaments. This also is commendable so long as it does not drop any of the distinctives garnered from solid exegesis along the way. But if everything is judged by a spiritual so-teriology, then any nascent philosophy of history in the soteriological process might be jettisoned prematurely—which this writer believes is just what has happened to the concept of national Israel for most of traditional covenantal thought. Accordingly, Henrikus Berkhof justifiably has complained that such a view only reflects our western doceticism and secular/sacred dichotomization of God’s world, rather than the results of hard exegesis.<sup>34</sup>

The promised rebuilding of David’s tent is a brief but direct reference to the total program of God announced to David in 2 Sam 7. Its significance was grasped by David when he exclaimed with uncontainable joy, “And this [new addition to the promise doctrine] is the charter for all mankind, O Lord GOD.”<sup>35</sup>

Such was the theology that “informed”<sup>36</sup> Amos’ allusion to David’s house. God’s plan did include the nations and Gentiles at large in the rebuilt Davidic “house.” Such also had been the program and intention of God all along since Abraham had received the word. Indeed, that was the principal thing: All mankind was to be blessed in Abraham and his seed (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:17–18; 26:3–4; 28:13–14). Abram was specifically promised that he would be “father of a multitude of nations” (Gen 17:5) when he was renamed Abraham. Beecher argued that “multitude” was an unlimited word, entirely different from “assembly of nations.”<sup>37</sup>

But no era of prophetic activity stressed this aspect of the promise doctrine more than did the 8th-century pre-exilic prophets. Isaiah was the master when it came to seeing the “nations” connected with the ancient and emerging promise of God. Thirty-six times he linked the “nations” with the promise in the last twenty-seven chapters of his work. Characteristically, Isa 42:6 affirmed: “I

---

34. H. Berkhof, *Christ the Meaning of History* (Richmond: Knox, 1966) 136-153. See W. C. Kaiser, Jr., “Old Promise,” p. 15 n. 24.

35. See the full argument in W. C. Kaiser, Jr., “Blessing of David,” pp. 298-318.

36. J. Bright’s phrase from *The Authority of the OT* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967) 143, 170. Such exegesis we call the “analogy of [antecedent] Scripture,” see n. 4 above.

37. W. J. Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975) 201 and n. 1. He also argued that Gen 17:6 is a specification subordinate to the broader statement of v 5 as in the other five passages about Abraham’s relation to the nations cited above. Nations will descend from him “but his being father of a multitude of nations is parallel with all the nations being blessed in him ....” *ibid.*

have given you [the Servant, Israel] as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations” while David’s “everlasting covenant” made him a “witness,” “leader” and “commandment giver ... to all the peoples.” Furthermore, to this new David who would yet come, it was said, “Behold, you shall call nations that you know not, and nations that knew you not shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy one of Israel, for he has glorified you” (Isa 55:3–5). Thus the invitation was open: ‘Turn unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn...: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess” (Isa 45:22). True, the nations would dramatically figure in God’s final “day of vengeance” (Isa 60:3, 5, 11, 12, 16) as well as in his current providential disposition of nations (Isa 41:2), but nothing can take away the obvious linkage of the Abrahamic and Davidic blessing to the nations with these references to Isaiah which promise the harvest of the days of the Church.

This missionary consciousness of the OT reached its climax in Isaiah. When the Messiah (“Servant”) would come at the incarnation with God’s approbation of him as the one “in whom my soul delights” (Isa 42:1), he would bring forth *mišpāt*, “justice or true, right religion” (Isa 42:1; cf. vv 3, 4).<sup>38</sup> “Justice, judgment” may mean God’s gracious and favorable<sup>39</sup> salvation. Davidson also notes that *mišpāt* is followed by *l* in only one other passage, Ps 146:7, where Yahweh “gave a decision in favor of the imprisoned”—i. e., a deliverance! Also note that Isa 51:4 linked God’s “law,” his “salvation,” and his “light to the peoples.”

Thus God’s servant was given as “a covenant to the people, a light to the nations” (Isa 42:6; 49:6, 8). Certainly Israel was to be restored and preserved, but God’s salvation designedly gave the seed of the covenant as “light to the nations” so that God’s “salvation might reach to the end of the earth.” Indeed, Jesus came with “good news for the afflicted” (Isa 61:1; 42:6; Luke 4:18), just as was predicted. We conclude that the inclusion of the Gentiles was part and parcel of God’s single plan with Israel!

Likewise Isaiah’s contemporary, Amos, had briefly but comprehensively referred to the same prospect: nations being called or owned by the name of the Lord. This was to dramatically increase “in that day,” a characteristic phrase used of the messianic era—i. e., of both the first coming (e.g., cf. Heb 1:1 and Acts 2:17) and the second coming.

Previously, whenever God had “glorified” Israel (Isa 55:5) and accomplished a triumph in and for his people Israel—as he did, for example, at the Red Sea and in the transjordanian battles over Sihon and Og—there the missionary work commenced as it did for the Canaanite Rahab, as

---

38. See the significant discussion of R. Davidson, “Universalism in Second Isaiah,” *SJT* 16 (1963) 166-185. W. Zimmerli remarks that “our whole interpretation of the Servant’s task will turn on our understanding of these words” [Isa 42:1].

39. Cf. J. van der Ploeg, “*Šāpaṭ* and *mišpāt*” in *OTS* 2 (1943) 144 fl. as cited by Davidson.

she testified in Josh 2:10–11. Now it would come like “light” bursting in on the Gentiles everywhere

#### **IV. Conclusion**

##### *A. James’ Use of Amos*

Here, then, is the point of our argument: James used a plain, simple and straightforward hermeneutic when he appealed to Amos. His understanding of the term “tabernacle of David” was replete with all the revelation of God which antedated that eighth-century revelation. What had been promised to Abraham was made over to David with an enlarged scope of reference: It was a veritable “charter for all humanity”! As a dynasty, it symbolized God’s rule and reign on into eternity.

However, the political and national aspects of that same promise could not be deleted from Amos’ truth-intention. As the suffixes in Amos 9:11 indicate, the northern and southern kingdom, the Davidic person, the people of Israel and the remnant of humanity at large were all encompassed in that rebuilding of the “tent of David,” even though its outward fortunes would appear to sag in the immediate events of the eighth century.

##### *B. The Systems Contrasted*

Evangelical theology, then, refuses to divorce any specific word of God (such as that of Amos) from the total but antecedent “promise” of God. Moreover, the hermeneutical principle used in these passages must be without a spiritualizing tendency which reassigns converted values of the OT secular or national word signs about Israel’s future (a process leading to dualism and docetic views of history)<sup>40</sup> or unilinear types of “literal” exegesis that bifurcate unified items by divorcing these phrases and passages from the antecedent theological context in which they were given.

To covenant theologians, we say that the inclusion of the Gentiles with Israel both throughout the history of redemption and especially after the cross may be obtained by solid grammatical-syntactical-theological exegesis without terminating God’s offer to the Jews. Both were there almost from the beginning, and both continue into the gospel era revelationally (Romans 9–11) and historically (the seminal reappearance of the state of Israel in 1948).

To dispensationalists, we say that the preservation of God’s promise to national Israel in the past and the future may be retained by sound grammatical-syntactical-historical exegesis without bifurcating the single plan of God into two peoples and two programs. This stress on different times, methods, and plans, while legitimately sensing an element of discontinuity in the Scriptures between Israel and the Church, has hardened into separate realities or ages what was only to be several *aspects* of the one eternal promise.

---

40. See our article, “The Eschatological Hermeneutics of Evangelicalism: Promise Theology,” *JETS* 13 (1970) 91-99, esp. pp. 92 ff.

These two systems, and the dilemmas they pose for each other, can only be reconciled by meeting where the Biblical writers authoritatively rested their case—viz., in the *epangelia*, to use the NT term, or in the *contents* of the covenant (not the *form* of the covenant, for there were many covenants, and stress on the form leads into the schema of looking for continuity structures in the signs, people, and the setting up of the series of old and new covenants).

### *C. Israel and the Church Then and Now*

What then are we to conclude about the Jerusalem council? Was circumcision necessary for Christian converts? No! God's future rested with a restoration of "David's hut" and the full promise of God, not in the perpetuation of the Mosaic ritual. So the prophets had predicted.

Was the "tabernacle of David" a type of the Christian Church which transferred especially Amos' national hopes into spiritual realities of the gospel era? Again, no! This fails to take seriously the verses that precede and follow Amos 9:11–12, much less the constant repetition of God's total program which encompassed the past, present and future in a plan that provided for the restoration of nature itself and the calling of Gentiles in that single kingdom of God. The *new* covenant was nothing *less* than what God had promised to Abraham and David, but it was also *more—but* along those same lines of thought already traced. And the "people of God" were and still are one. That was James' point and Amos' prediction! Both Jews and Gentiles—Edomites included—would be "called by the name of the Lord."

Time fails me to recall the terminology used of believers in 1 Pet 2:5, 9, 10 which originally belonged to Israel in Exod 19:5–6 and Isa 43:21. Furthermore, Gentiles have become part of the "seed of Abraham" (Gal 3:29)—not by analogy, spiritualization, or some type of midrashic *peshet*, but by the authorial intention of the OT and NT writers and the single plan of God.

Promise theology, or *epangelicalism*, without setting out to be a middle way between covenant theology and dispensationalism, promises to be such, for it picks up the strengths of both systems of exegesis. If a vigorous exegetical theology and a revived Biblical theology that heeds historical canons and contexts would take the lead in all future theological construction, then we would be able to witness a renaissance of that Biblical picture of a unified people and program of God which refuses to exclude either Israel or the Church, God's kingdom in heaven or on earth. I urge my generation to hold its finger on the Biblical text and context while it talks through these complex issues. May God yet grant us a reformation that will shake the foundations of our culture to the glory of God once more before the King himself appears.