

Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary

THE QUOTATION OF AMOS 9:11–12 IN ACTS 15:16–18

by

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Hebrew Exegesis of Amos: 157, 7:30 A.M.

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## Introduction

The goal of this paper is to clearly explain the Apostle James' quotation of Amos 9:11–12 at the Jerusalem council as recorded in Acts 15:16–18. There is significant debate on this topic in the literature. For instance, Aldrich writes that James is reasoning that “the prophets anticipate a future dealing with the Gentiles and so this present visitation of God to the Gentiles is not out of harmony with the divine attitude toward them.”<sup>1</sup> But Kaiser argues opposite, stating that, “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.”<sup>2</sup> A careful examination reveals that the challenges in interpreting these two passages are even more significant than those quotations suggests. There are such problems and questions as:

- What textual and translational problems are there in Amos 9:11–12?
- Does James quote Amos exactly? Must the quotation be exact to be accurate or to convey the important point? Is there a hopeless contradiction between the quote and the original?<sup>3</sup>
- Why does James use the verb “seek” when Amos uses the verb “possess”?
- What is Amos actually predicting?
- At what time will Amos' prediction be fulfilled? Does James' use of Amos suggest that the kingdom has been inaugurated already?

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<sup>1</sup> Willard M. Aldrich, “The Interpretation of Acts 15:13-18,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 111 (October–December 1954): 317–23.

<sup>2</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of the Gentiles (Amos 9:9–15 and Acts 15:13–18): A Test Passage for Theological Systems,” *JETS* 20 (June 1977): 105.

<sup>3</sup> So Haenchen: “The Hebrew text would be useless for James's argument, and would event contradict it.” See Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, trans. R. McL. Wilson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 448.

- Is James' quotation faithful to the authorial intent of Amos? Is James bringing out the "real meaning" of Amos' prophecy?
- Do the problems in text and translation suggest a weakened doctrine of inspiration must be accepted?

These questions basically fall into three major categories. The first category is textual, the second is interpretive, and the third is theological/hermeneutical.

In order to accomplish the goal of the paper and answer these questions, the paper will address each of these major categories in turn. First it will examine the text and translation of the Hebrew text and LXX of Amos 9:11–12, and then the Greek text and translation of Acts 15:16–18, in order to draw some conclusions to guide the rest of the paper. Then, the various interpretive issues will be explored within the contexts of Amos and Acts to see how the quotation may be harmonized with the prophet's words. Finally, the paper will cover some theological and hermeneutical issues relevant to the passage.<sup>4</sup> These will include brief discussions of inspiration and interpretive principles having to do with the use of the OT in the NT and fulfillment of prophecy.

### **Textual Issues**

There are a number of issues in the texts of Amos and Acts that must be examined before even starting work on the interpretation of the passages. These will be examined under three headings: the Hebrew text, Septuagint text, and Greek text.

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<sup>4</sup>The scope of this paper does not include a full examination of text critical evidence for the development of the LXX. It will be taken as a given, even though an examination of this data would be interesting future work.

*Hebrew Text and Translation of Amos 9:11–12*

From the vantage point of the Hebrew Bible, the text and translation issues are not overly complex. The main difficulty in the text has to do with the pronominal suffixes in 9:11 on “its broken places” and “its ruins.” From Hebrew, they would be literally translated “the broken places of their-fem-plural” and “the ruins of him-masc-singular.” The first disagrees in number, and the second in gender, with the antecedent “fallen tent” which is a feminine singular form. Only the feminine singular pronominal suffix on “build it-fem-singular” agrees with “fallen tent.” The NIV has harmonized the suffixes to agree with the understood singular antecedent, and since “tent” in English does not convey a feminine or masculine idea, the pronoun “it” “its” works well. The Hebrew text is laid out in the following table next to the NIV translation.

Amos 9:11–12 BHS <sup>5</sup>	Amos 9:11–12 NIV <sup>9</sup>
<p style="text-align: right;">11 בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא</p> <p style="text-align: center;">אֶקִּים אֶת־סֹכֶת דָּוִד הַנִּפְלֹתָ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">וְגִדַרְתִּי אֶת־פְּרֻצֵיהֶן<sup>6</sup></p> <p style="text-align: center;">וְהִרְסֹתִיו אֶקִּים</p> <p style="text-align: center;">וּבְנִיתִיהָ</p> <p style="text-align: center;">כִּי־יָמִי עוֹלָם:</p>	<p>11 “In that day I will restore David’s fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be,</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">12 לְמַעַן יִירְשׁוּ<sup>8</sup> אֶת־שְׂאֵרֵיט אֲדוֹם</p> <p style="text-align: center;">וְכָל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־נִקְרְאוּ שְׁמִי עֲלֵיהֶם</p> <p style="text-align: center;">נְאֻם־יְהוָה</p> <p style="text-align: center;">עֲשֵׂה זֹאת: פ</p>	<p>12 so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name,” declares the LORD, who will do these things.</p>

<sup>5</sup>All Hebrew Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1976) [hereafter cited as BHS].

<sup>6</sup>The textual apparatus of BHS indicates that the Septuagint and the Latin Vulgate translators read the text as a third person feminine singular pronominal suffix here instead of the third person feminine plural suffix present in BHS. The NIV follows the singular. The UBS Greek text uses a singular pronoun here as well.

Several potential solutions are offered for this pronoun problem, including total despair of making sense of the pronouns, changing “booth” to “booths,” finding some synonymous parallelism based on collective suffixes, or referring to various parts of the Davidic promise of 2 Sam. 7:11–16. Cushman examines these views and concludes that it is best to accept the reading of the MT and understand the suffixes to refer to the “booth” of David despite the syntactical discord.<sup>10</sup> I would not find it objectionable to refer the feminine plural suffix to the split nation (each viewed as a feminine singular, together as feminine plural), and the “his ruins” to the ruins of David. But this is not necessary to understand the message of the prophet.

#### *Septuagint Text and Translation of Amos 9:11–12*

The LXX text is laid out in the following table, opposite the NIV translation with the marginal reading that corresponds to the LXX. There are several differences between LXX and BHS.

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<sup>7</sup>BHS refers to the Septuagint again. The LXX translator seems to have read the text as having a third person feminine singular suffix instead of the masculine singular suffix shown in BHS. The NIV follows the LXX again. The UBS Greek text uses a singular pronoun here as well.

<sup>8</sup>The BHS apparatus does not indicate any question as to the reading of יִרְשׁוּ, the qal imperfect third person masculine plural of the verb יָרַשׁ (to possess), despite the LXX reading of ἐκζητήσωσιν (to seek out, search for). The Vulgate supports the BHS reading: “ut possideant [to inherit/possess] reliquias Idumeae...” See R. Weber, B. Fischer, J. Gribomont, H.F.D. Sparks, and W. Thiele, *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983).

<sup>9</sup>All English Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the NIV.

<sup>10</sup>Neil Cushman, “The Gentile Mission: Amos 9:11-12 and the Jerusalem Council” (paper presented at the Bible Faculty Leadership Summit 2004, Winston-Salem, NC, 29–31 July 2004), p. 19–23.

LXX<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ  
 ἀναστήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν  
 καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὰ πεπτωκότα αὐτῆς  
 καὶ τὰ κατεσκαμμένα αὐτῆς ἀναστήσω  
 καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω αὐτήν  
 καθὼς αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ αἰῶνος

<sup>12</sup> ὅπως ἐκζητήσωσιν  
 οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων  
 καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη  
 ἐφ' οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ' αὐτούς  
 λέγει κύριος ὁ θεὸς  
 ὁ ποιῶν ταῦτα

NIV with Margin Reading<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> “In that day  
 I will restore David’s fallen tent.  
 I will repair its broken places,  
 restore its ruins,  
 and build it  
 as it used to be,

<sup>12</sup> so that the remnant of men  
 and all the nations that bear my name  
 may seek [*the Lord*],”  
 declares the LORD,  
 who will do these things.

First, in verse 11, the pronominal suffixes of the Hebrew have been harmonized to agree with the feminine singular antecedent “booth,” either by conscious choice of the LXX translators to translate all the pronouns as feminine singulars, or because they had a Hebrew *Vorlage* that contained third person feminine singular suffixes.

Second, in verse 12, LXX translators either missed or eliminated the direct object marker from “the remnant” because it has become the subject of the verb. Some vowel adjustments have been made on Edom to make it “men.” And the verb has been read as “to seek” from the Hebrew  $\text{שׁוֹרֵר}$  instead of  $\text{שׁוֹרֵר}$ . The LXX also does not supply a direct object for the verb “to seek,” which in Hebrew requires some sort of complement, usually an accusative, to complete the idea of the verb. NIV’s marginal reading supplies the object “the Lord” for clarity.

The number and especially the type of differences, particularly the missing direct object

<sup>11</sup> Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *LXX Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1935).

<sup>12</sup> This translation reflects the NIV marginal note on the Septuagint variant in verse 12.

for the verb to seek, indicate that the problem lies with the LXX and not with the Hebrew text.<sup>13</sup>

*Greek Text and Translation of Acts 15:16–18*

James' quote starts off loosely but quickly comes into close conformity to the LXX of Amos 9:11–12, even if it does not always use the exact same vocabulary. So in answer to our earlier question as to whether James quotes Amos exactly, we can firmly say “No.” The initial phrase “After this I will return” seems to be an interpretive gloss on his part, standing in place of the “in that day” of Amos. At the end of the quote, verse 18 is another addition made by James.

The verbs he uses to refer to the restoration of David's booth do not match up to the LXX precisely, but the same message is conveyed. James omits the phrase “as it used to be” or “as in the days of old” from the end of verse 16. His quotation clearly reflects Septuagint influence in verse 18, where the subject is “the remnant of men,” the verb is “to seek,” and the direct object “the Lord” is supplied.

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<sup>13</sup>For some additional details and further explanation on the differences between the Hebrew and Greek texts, the reader may consult Gleason L. Archer and G. C. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), pp. 152–55.

UBS4<sup>14</sup>

<sup>16</sup> μετὰ ταῦτα  
 ἀναστρέψω  
 καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ τὴν  
 πεπτωκυῖαν  
 καὶ τὰ κατεσκαμμένα<sup>15</sup> αὐτῆς ἀνοικοδομήσω  
 καὶ ἀνορθώσω αὐτήν,

<sup>17</sup> ὅπως ἂν ἐκζητήσωσιν  
 οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸν κύριον  
 καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη  
 ἐφ' οὓς ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐπ' αὐτούς,  
 λέγει κύριος  
 ποιῶν ταῦτα

<sup>18</sup> γινωστὰ ἀπ' αἰῶνος.<sup>16</sup>

## NIV

<sup>16</sup> ““After this  
 I will return  
 and rebuild David’s fallen tent.

Its ruins I will rebuild,  
 and I will restore it,

<sup>17</sup> that the remnant of men  
 may seek the Lord,  
 and all the Gentiles who bear my name,  
 says the Lord,  
 who does these things’

<sup>18</sup> that have been known for ages.

*Two Basic Approaches*

There are two main approaches to solving the textual problems associated with James’ use of Amos. The first solution is to say that Acts and the LXX of Amos reflect the actual reading of the original Hebrew manuscript of Amos, particularly regarding the main issue of the verb “to seek” or “to possess.” The Hebrew original, this view concludes, must have been “to seek.” There is therefore no problem with the quotation or authorial intent. The only problem is with the surviving Hebrew manuscripts. The most recent Scofield Study Bible supports this view that the reading “may seek the Lord” is the original. The editors argue that James’ use of that verb verifies that the original reading was  $\text{יִשְׁׁרְדְּ}$ . The note at Amos 9:12 explains that

<sup>14</sup>All Greek New Testament Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from E. Nestle and K. Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

<sup>15</sup>There is a minor variant here which does not affect the meaning of the text. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2000), p. 379.

<sup>16</sup>On this phrase, see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. 379, who remarks that a number of variants has arisen in verse 18. It modifies ταῦτα from the previous verse. The phrase is not part of Amos, so it is reasonable to conclude that it is James’ closing comment.

The corruption of this letter must have occurred after the time of the apostles, for James thus quoted the verse at the Jerusalem Council, and based his decision upon it (Acts 15:14–17). There were learned men present, some of them hostile to his view, who would certainly have shouted him down if he had based his decision upon a reading different from that which existed in the then current Hebrew manuscripts.<sup>17</sup>

This first solution basically boils down to harmonizing the Hebrew of Amos to the LXX of Amos and NT of Acts by emending the preserved Hebrew consonantal text by one letter (*yod* to *daleth*), and changing the direct object marker before “remnant” to reflect that God is actually the direct object and “remnant” is the subject.<sup>18</sup>

While this solution is attractive, it has some serious drawbacks. First, as noted above, BHS does not suggest there are any textual variants here that would support this reading. Second, the Vulgate and Peshitta (Syriac) do not support this reading.<sup>19</sup> Third, the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate there were Hebrew texts from before the apostolic era in which the text reads “possess the remnant of Edom.”<sup>20</sup> That is to say, if the text is indeed corrupt, the Scofield Bible is incorrect to say

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<sup>17</sup>C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Study Bible, New King James Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 1226.

<sup>18</sup>The same view is tentatively espoused in Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), p. 394. Braun also supports this view. See below. Archer and Chirichigno firmly support the emendation view. See Archer and Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations*, p. 155. See also Cornelius R. Stam, *Acts Dispensationally Considered* (German-town, WI: Berean Bible Society, 1954), p. 270, fn. See also J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy: The Complete Guide to Scriptural Predictions and Their Fulfillment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 417, though he admits that whichever view one takes, the “basic thought remains unaltered, of God’s name being called upon a remnant of the Gentiles.”

<sup>19</sup>For the Vulgate, see Weber, et al., *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983). For the Peshitta, see George M. Lamsa, *The Holy Bible from the Peshitta* (Philadelphia: Holman, 1957). For an introduction to the Peshitta, see M. P. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament: An Introduction* (Cambridge: University Press, 1999). Finley agrees about the Peshitta. See Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah* in the Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary, ed. Kenneth Barker (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), p. 328. (This paragraph does not appear in the Biblical Studies Press version of Finley’s book.)

<sup>20</sup>Martin Abegg, Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999), p. 440. Abegg, et al. translate Amos this way: “[11 In tha]t [day] will I raise up [the booth of David that is fallen, and close up their breaches; and] I will [rai]se up his [ru]ins, [and I will build it as in the days of old; 12 that] they [may poss]ess the remnant of Edom [and

that “the corruption . . . must have occurred *after* the time of the apostles” [emphasis added]. The verb “possess” is used in the Scrolls, which date *at or before* the time of the apostles. What was formerly a convenient argument from the silence of extant data<sup>21</sup> turns out to be unpersuasive. The sect of the Pharisees which professed to believe but insisted on circumcision for salvation may either a) have known there was already a potential debate at this text but that it did not largely affect the point of the quote because the LXX was a legitimate application of Amos’ words; or b) did not know the Hebrew well enough to know that the LXX was different.

At this point, note should be made of Braun’s support for emending the MT. He strongly believes that there “was a Hebrew text divergent from the MT and superior to it.”<sup>22</sup> His arguments include the following: (1) the initial difference in the quotation may indicate the superior source; (2) the scroll 4QFlor uses the same modified initial wording that James does; and (3) *Tg. Jonathan* demonstrates Jewish angst over the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s program, and thus the MT is more likely corrupted toward a reading favorable to Jewish dominance or exclusion of Gentile converts. Against these arguments, it should be noted that Braun undercuts his

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all the nations who are called by my name,] declares the Lord that does this.” Square brackets surround text lost in the scroll due to various types of damage, but that is restored from the MT. In that “[may possess]” contains square brackets at a key point for my argument, it might be argued that the reading is so uncertain that it might go either way, and that no conclusion can be made from this English translation of the DSS. However, we noted earlier that the LXX not only changes the verb to “to seek” but also modifies the pointing on Edom to read “man” and eliminates the direct object marker אֶת־ in אֶת־שְׂאֵרֵי־יִתְּ אֶת־ “remnant.” Abegg’s translation indicates that he read “the remnant of Edom” as the direct object of the verb, so that his provision of “[may possess]” from the MT is very likely an accurate rendition of the original text. Archer and Chirichigno (*Old Testament Quotations*, p. 155) conjecture that in the Qumran period there may have been a Hebrew *Vorlage* for the LXX that contained “to seek” and that this source reflected the original text. Abegg’s translation would suggest otherwise. Further research, or perhaps the uncovering of evidence not yet extant, would help. Suffice to say for now that the extant evidence supports the Hebrew reading “to possess.”

<sup>21</sup>This silence extended well after the original Scofield Bible and the New Scofield Bible, at least up to the late twentieth century when the content of the Scrolls became more widely available.

<sup>22</sup>Michael A. Braun, “James’ Use of Amos at the Jerusalem Council: Steps Toward a Possible Solution of the Textual and Theological Problems,” *JETS* 20 (June 1977): 117.

own first argument when he says that the initial part of the quotation may not have been part of James' source at all; in other words, it could be an interpretive addition to explain the upcoming quote, as I will argue later.<sup>23</sup> Second, the argument about the scroll 4QFlor only has to do with the initial part of the quotation. There is no support in this argument for the change of verb or direct object or the pointing on Edom. And finally, the "probable causes" of corruption in the MT are very tenuous. The *Targumim* cannot drive a hypothetical textual corruption when there is no Hebrew manuscript evidence for such a corruption. In short, Braun's case is conjectural and is not supported by the extant evidence.

Another caution is in order here. Just because the LXX has a different reading than the Hebrew, this is not sufficient to emend the MT. Granted, Braun's reasoning is not that simplistic, but the point needs to be raised. History has seen an ebb and flow of reliance on the LXX, a situation which has served to temper modern scholars' use of the LXX so that they take "the middle road between recognizing Hebrew variants and the translators' exegesis."<sup>24</sup> That is to say, each discrepancy between LXX and MT must be handled on a case-by-case basis. In the case of Amos 9:12, Jobes and Silva cogently argue that there is little reason to emend the MT on the basis of the LXX, because the Hebrew is not at all difficult. The LXX translator may have misread the original or interpreted it in accord with his theological or hermeneutical presuppositions.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Braun, "Use of Amos at the Jerusalem Council," p. 116.

<sup>24</sup>Emmanuel Tov, *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*, 2nd ed., rev. and enlarged (Jerusalem: Simor Ltd., 1997), p. 34. Tov says that Qumran finds have enhanced the credibility of the LXX, but he still takes a tentative position, even though his book, a 300 page volume, has a lot to say on the use of the LXX in text criticism.

<sup>25</sup>Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), pp. 194–95. Marshall agrees in his commentary on Acts in G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), p. 591.

Gelston argues that it was the former (a misreading of the original) that occasioned the discrepancy in the LXX of Amos at 9:12. Based on his preparation for the apparatus of Amos in the *Biblica Hebraica Quinta*, he suggests that there seems to be an unusually high number of misreadings by the LXX translator of the Hebrew *Vorlage*. He catalogs about 30 such cases in Amos, many of which can be explained straightforwardly by a change in one or two letters from the Hebrew original.<sup>26</sup> Such confusion over individual letters indicates that “the difficulty lay principally in the actual handwriting of the Hebrew text that formed the *Vorlage* used by the LXX translator.”<sup>27</sup> He appeals to these observations to argue that

In the light of the previous examples cited in this study, however, it seems more likely that the LXX translator merely misread a single letter (*yod* as *daleth*). For the lack of an object to the verb “seek” in the original LXX translation is surely a greater difficulty than the lack of a subject (which can readily be supplied from the previous verse) to the verb “possess” in the MT. It is, moreover, difficult to suppose that the universalist theme of the reading presupposed by the LXX would have been secondarily modified into the reading of the MT, while the reverse modification could easily be envisaged. A further argument... is the apparent tautology between the phrases “the residue of humankind” and “all the nations...”, while the MT presupposed a natural progression from Edom to a wider group of nations claimed by God... It is hardly possible to reach a definitive conclusion about the original text of this clauses, but the cumulative evidence presented in the current study would suggest that the LXX rendering arose initially through the accidental misreading of a single Hebrew letter.”<sup>28</sup>

The bottom line is that there is no warrant for emendation of the consonantal text—at least not based Hebrew manuscripts, the Vulgate, the Peshitta, or the Dead Sea Scrolls. This leads to the second and preferred solution, which is to say that since there are no indicators of

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<sup>26</sup> A. Gelston, “Some Hebrew Misreadings in the Septuagint of Amos,” *VT* 52 no. 4 (October 2002): 493–500.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 499.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

textual corruption other than in the LXX, the error must be in the LXX itself.<sup>29</sup> The translators misread the Hebrew original or had an errant Hebrew *Vorlage*. This approach argues that the BHS reading of the text can be handled apart from emendation. Instead of locating the problem with the text, the problem becomes one of the meaning in Acts. In short, instead of solving the problem with text criticism, we must solve it using interpretive and theological tools.

Questions arise as to whether by so doing that we jeopardize either James' point at the Jerusalem council or the doctrine of inspiration in general or a consistent conservative hermeneutic. To the first of these matters we now turn.

## Interpretive Issues

### *Amos Context*

Amos 9:11–15 is a single unit which promises blessing<sup>30</sup> for the nation of Israel under a restored Davidic monarchy in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:12–16).<sup>31</sup> Verses 11–12 introduce the promised blessing by predicting God's restoration of the ruling structure of

<sup>29</sup>McCabe agrees, "I do not take James's citation of this passage to mean that the Septuagint is the original reading. The Septuagint is a proper application of the words of Amos..." See Robert V. McCabe, "Hebrew Exegesis of Amos" (class notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Fall 2007), p. 117. Later in this paper I will discuss some implications of this for the doctrine of inspiration.

<sup>30</sup>Some commentators take issue with the juxtaposition in Amos of the restoration motif at the end of a book almost entirely consisting of judgment. It is evidence of a later redactor's hand, they suggest. See, for instance, Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, trans. Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride, Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow, *Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), p. 351. However, many Biblical prophets placed judgment and blessing material in close proximity in their writings. See, for example, Hos 2:1–13 and 2:14–23 and Mic 3:9–12 and 4:1–5.

<sup>31</sup>For an introduction to the background and book of Amos, the reader should consult commentaries by Finley, Niehaus, Smith, or Stuart. See Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, pp. 105–22 [pp. 99–114 in the Biblical Studies Press version]; Jeffrey Niehaus, *Amos*, in vol. 1 of *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), pp. 315–34; Billy K. Smith, *Amos*, in vol. 19B of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), pp. 23–34; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, in vol. 31 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), pp. 274–95.

the Davidic dynasty and the expansion of its political influence. Verses 13 through 15 speak of the nation's restoration to the land and the agricultural blessing that will accompany it. Israel has been sifted among the nations from the time of the Assyrian destruction until the present day (9:9–10). But God will raise it again to be the head of the nations.<sup>32</sup>

The unique content of the section and the temporal phrases “in that day” and “the days are coming” indicate that the promise will be fulfilled in the eschaton. The temporal phrases must indicate something like “after the time when judgment has been finished,” because the oracle would otherwise “undercut much of what Amos has previously said.”<sup>33</sup> That is to say, the antecedent of “that day” must be taken in light of the destruction of the sinful kingdom (9:8), the sifting of the house of Israel among the nations (9:9), and the preservation of a remnant (9:9). The prophecies of verses 11 through 15 will take place in the day that these negative events have been completed. In particular, the promise has not been fulfilled since the time of the Assyrian destruction, but will finally be realized in the millennial kingdom. A literal approach to Scripture demands such a conclusion, for the nation of Israel has not experienced such blessings since the Babylonian exile.

In verse 11, the raising of “David's tent” has generated some discussion in the literature as to why the term for “booth” is used and to what precisely it refers.<sup>34</sup> Given the political con-

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<sup>32</sup>Deut 15:6, 26:19, 28:1, 12–13 use this kind of terminology under the Mosaic Covenant. But other texts predict that it will occur in the future restoration. See Rom 4:13 which speaks of the promise that Abraham would be the “heir of world.” Note also Isa 56:1–8 where it is indicated that the Gentiles will be gathered to God around the nation Israel.

<sup>33</sup>David Allan Hubbard, *Joel & Amos*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), p. 236.

<sup>34</sup> See Hubbard, *Joel & Amos*, p. 239 and Francis I Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 24A AB (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 889.

text of verse 12, it is best to take this as a rare way to refer to the Davidic dynasty and his restored rule in the millennium. We would expect the term “kingdom” or “house” to be used instead (as in 2 Chron 21:7) but Isaiah 4:6 uses the same term to denote a tabernacle for shade and shelter in the kingdom, so the term is not totally unique in the Old Testament. A booth was a temporary structure. Despite the somewhat negative connotation of this phrase, God will restore the booth so it will be like in the “days of old.” The kingdom may not have lasted in its original form, but it did have a certain amount of glory in the days of David and Solomon. God’s action in raising up the booth will fortify it so that it will last far into the future.

There are four statements as to the condition of David’s booth. The first is that it has “fallen.” After the reign of Solomon, the Israelite kingdom was in a state of increasing dysfunction. Note that the same verb “to fall” is used of the nation in 5:2. The prophet Isaiah describes Judah using the same term “booth,” “shelter,” or “hut” in the first chapter of his prophecy. There the “booth” idea conveys that not much was left of the original condition of the nation. In fact, without God’s preservation of a remnant, the booth would have been totally destroyed like Sodom (Isa 1:7–9). As used in Amos 9:11, the “fallen” idea does not imply that the Assyrian captivity is already past,<sup>35</sup> for the nation in Amos’ day was in such a bad state that it is not a stretch to say that it was in a fallen down, dilapidated condition even before the captivity.

Correlating this text with the Davidic covenant in 2 Samuel 7 shows that the prophet is speaking of a restored Davidic dynasty. This will entail a reversal of the punishment that has beset the northern and southern kingdoms; instead, they will be reunited (Jer 30:3, Ezek 37). Amos also implies that they will be brought into a harmonious relationship with God. It was their very

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<sup>35</sup> Despite the argument to the contrary in Anderson and Freedman, *Amos*, p. 889–90.

departure from God for idols and related injustices that put them into the place of punishment.

The other three statements regarding the condition of the booth have to do with the repairs that God will make to it. These phrases refer to a thoroughgoing restoration of the kingdom.<sup>36</sup>

In verse 12, the result of this restoration is that the booth of David and the nation will possess Edom and the nations. The particle לְמַעַן seems to indicate a result, or at most a secondary purpose, for it seems unlikely that God’s primary purpose in raising up David’s booth would be to establish a rule over the nations.<sup>37</sup> There are several similar prophecies in the Old Testament. Obadiah 19–20 predicts that the house of Jacob will possess the mountains of Esau and a number of other Palestinian territories. But the term “nations” should not be limited to neighboring Gentile nations. Rather, these are the nations of the world.

The verb “to possess” is a key term because of the debate about which verb is present in the original. The verb present in BHS has three basic flavors: to take possession of something, to inherit something from someone, or to displace and dispossess someone of their possession.<sup>38</sup> It is often used of taking (over) territory by military force. There is no “spiritual possession” nuance to this word as if it solely specifies the salvation of Edom and the nations.

A context that sheds light on Amos’ prophecy is found in Isaiah 54:1–3. It uses the word

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<sup>36</sup> See McCabe, “Hebrew Exegesis of Amos,” p. 116-18. Others have the same basic interpretation, even if differing as to the details of fulfillment and nature of the kingdom. See Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, p. 323–24 [pp. 281–2 in the Biblical Studies Press version]; Niehaus, *Amos*, p. 490-91; Smith, *Amos*, p. 166; and Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah*, p. 398. Hubbard disagrees, suggesting that the booth terminology refers to a restoration of the nation to pre-monarchic conditions. See Hubbard, *Joel & Amos*, p. 239.

<sup>37</sup> Hubbard and others take this as a purpose clause. See Hubbard, *Joel & Amos*, p. 240, as well as Niehaus, *Amos*, p. 491.

<sup>38</sup> See HALOT, s.v. “יָרַשׁ”, p. 440.

“tent” and “dwelling place” in verse 2 and the verb “to possess, inherit” in verse 3. Isaiah says that the “tent” of Israel will expand so that Israel will inherit the nations. This is like saying that the nations will come under the governing umbrella of Israel, whose territory and influence will be expanded beyond its historical borders. A “tent” is very similar to a “booth” as a covering or temporary type of structure. The word for “dwelling place” is used as a parallel to the term “tent” in the Isaiah passage. If the terms are not synonymous, they are certainly closely related, and “dwelling place” is sometimes used in the OT for the tabernacle (Exodus 25:9, 26:1). Since we have an example of a “tent” referring to political and military possession of the nations, it is not at all a stretch to presume that the term “booth” could be used in a similar fashion in Amos 9.

So, Amos is consistent with the vast body of Scriptural revelation which teaches a coming kingdom over which Messiah will rule and in which Israel will be at the head of the nations.

However, this prophesied kingdom age is not exclusively political or military in its constitution. McClain has aptly shown that it also has spiritual, ethical, and ecclesiastical (religious) features, among others.<sup>39</sup> One need only consider such Biblical texts as the “kingdom of priests” in Exodus 19:6 or the Branch who will be a priest upon his throne in Zechariah 6:12–13 to be convinced that the kingdom age will be characterized by religious functions as well as governmental functions. There will be no “wall of separation” between church and state in the kingdom.

Some have gone further and argued that “to possess” is only or largely spiritual in nature<sup>40</sup> but the semantics of the term do not support this. On the other hand, the idea of “possession” should not be construed in such a way that it totally excludes religious features either. A

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<sup>39</sup>Alva McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1974), p. 218–54.

<sup>40</sup>Walter Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 184.

more realistic view is to see this possession as speaking of political rule which brings Gentiles into the mediatorial kingdom of God, which in turn provides an environment which has significant religious or spiritual elements in it.<sup>41</sup>

This brings us to the two groups of people that the kingdom of David will possess. The two groups are parallel—the remnant of Edom and “all-the-called-by-my-name” Gentiles—but not synonymous. Since these are parallel, the component terms “remnant” and “called by my name” seem to be related to one another.<sup>42</sup> Just as spiritual implications cannot be excluded by the verb “to possess,” these terms do not exclude a spiritual relationship between these groups and God. While “remnant” may refer simply to a small number of people in whatever circumstance (2 Sam 21:2; 1 Kings 14:10; 2 Kings 21:14; Ezra 9:14), it is clear that the use of the term in other Biblical texts refers to a spiritual relationship between God and the small number of people (2 Kings 19:30–31, 2 Chron 30:6; Isa 1:9 and Rom 9:29; Isa 10:20–22 and Rom 9:27; Isa 11:11, 28:5). In light of what the Scriptures teach about the coming kingdom (see below), it is reasonable to say that the “remnant of Edom” has some kind of spiritual relationship with God, or at least some level of blessing attends the remnant’s participation in the rule of David.

The phrase “called by my name” is used in a number of Biblical texts to refer to Israel who was called by God’s name (Deut 28:10, 2 Chron 7:14), Israel who was not called by God’s name (Isa 65:1), individual Jews (Isa 43:7), the temple (Jer 7:10–14), Jeremiah himself (Jer

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<sup>41</sup>Cushman supports this view. See Cushman, “The Gentile Mission: Amos 9:11-12 and the Jerusalem Council,” p. 25.

<sup>42</sup>It is interesting to note that if this point is accepted, the LXX translation does not offer precisely the same parallel between Edom and the Gentiles. It has more of a synonymy between “remnant of mankind” and “Gentiles who are called by my name.” This seems somewhat redundant (remnant of mankind and called-by-my-name Gentiles seem to say basically the same thing). This is another argument suggesting that the LXX’s is in error here.

15:16), and Jerusalem (Jer 25:29). In Isaiah 4:1 seven women ask one man to be called by his name. In 2 Samuel 12:27–28, Joab tells David that he is about to defeat the city Rabbah and summons the king to finish capturing it lest the city be “called by my name.” This indicates the name called over something is one of ownership, victory, and protection. Isaiah 63:19 makes clear that the notion of being called by one’s name has to do with ruling. To say that someone or something is called by God’s name speaks of God’s ownership and rule, but it also sometimes implies a good spiritual relationship. Sunukjian notes that bearing someone’s name means “to be under the suzerainty and protection of that individual.”<sup>43</sup> But ownership by God does not mean precisely the same thing as ownership by David’s house. There is some kind of connection between the Gentiles and God which is not precisely the same as the connection between the Gentiles and the Davidic kingdom. Israel will possess or inherit the nations; but those nations will also be “called by my name.”

The Bible teaches that at the inauguration of the millennial kingdom, all those who are not believers will be eliminated (Ezek 20:33–38; Matt 13:41–43, 13:47–50, 25:41). Therefore those who remain and are “possessed” will also have a positive spiritual relationship with God. That is, the remnant of Edom consists of the physical survivors at the inauguration of the kingdom, who have also submitted to God’s rule. The Gentiles who are called by God’s name are likewise those who have survived to the inauguration of the kingdom, are under the rule of the kingdom, and are in a favorable relationship to God as well.

The bottom line of all this is to say that when God sets up the booth of David again, those

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<sup>43</sup>Donald R. Sunukjian, “Amos,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), p. 1451.

Edomites and other Gentiles under its rule will be “possessed” militarily and politically but also will be related to God as well. The plain meaning of “possess” in a military, political, or inheritance sense is not undercut by this interpretation. Rather, the political rule will not be in a religious vacuum; it will be in an environment that has spiritual implications as well.

It would be too much of a stretch, however, to go as far as to say that this “possession” is the equivalent of those people “seeking” God. That is, the LXX translation does not capture the “real” or “spiritual” meaning of Amos; rather, the LXX is consistent with the Hebrew original of Amos despite the textual discrepancy that it introduced.

#### *Acts Context*

The debate at the Jerusalem council primarily concerned whether it was necessary to keep the law to be saved (Acts 15:1, 5).<sup>44</sup> But because this primary concern had to do with the Gentiles who did not keep the law, the whole issue of the relationship of the Gentiles to God’s plan came to the forefront of the debate. Peter, Paul, and Barnabas testified before the assembly that they had personally witnessed the conversion of Gentiles (Acts 15:7). God had given them the Spirit and cleansed them through faith (15:8, 9), not making a distinction based on ethnicity.

James responded by reminding those present that Peter testified “how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself” (15:14, NIV). “At first” refers to Peter’s first encounter with Gentiles in Acts 10 and 11 “some time ago” (15:7).

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<sup>44</sup>For brief introductions to the book of Acts and the context of chapter 15, the reader should consult the works by Kent, Ryrie, or Toussaint. See Homer A. Kent, *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), pp. 13–17 and 120–29; Charles C. Ryrie, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Everyman’s Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1961), pp. 7–11 and 81–85; and Toussaint, “Acts,” pp. 349–353 and 393–96.

The NIV rendition of “a people for himself” is an unfortunate translation of the text which literally says that God was taking from the Gentiles a people “for his name.” This phrase figures importantly into the quotation from Amos, as previously suggested and as will become clearer in the remainder of this paper. In fact, besides the concept of God taking *Gentiles* to himself, the word *name* may have been the primary reason James selected the quote relating the Gentiles to “God’s name” since Amos mentions those Gentiles “who bear my name.” It would be better to keep this connection in the English translation.<sup>45</sup>

It is clear that the issue was whether the Gentiles were really “in” or not. From the testimonies of Peter and Paul it would seem clear that they are “in.” To strengthen the argument for Gentile inclusion, James turns to the prophets to show that what they are observing presently is consistent with Old Testament revelation. The Pharisees may be swayed by this closing argument from their own Scriptures. This is where the quote from Amos comes in.

James argues that the words of the prophets in general agree with their observation that Gentiles are being called by God to salvation. Perhaps to the great surprise (or chagrin) of the Pharisees at the Jerusalem council, many passages of the Old Testament speak of the Gentiles in relation to salvation and the nation of Israel. For instance, Isaiah 11:10 prophesies that the Gentiles will seek the root of Jesse. Zechariah 2:11 says “Many nations will be joined with the

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<sup>45</sup>All this is not to say that the NIV has misinterpreted the meaning of “a people for his name,” for this phrase does mean “a people for himself.” Rather, I am arguing for consistency in the translation of “name” in both verses 14 and 17 in order to better convey the sense to the English reader. As the NIV stands, it inconsistently translates the phrases “a people for himself...Gentiles who bear my name.” The other major English translations use “name” in both places, translating something like “a people for his name...Gentiles who are called by my name” (ESV, KJV, NASB, NKJV). In verse 14, NET has “a people for his name” but then in verse 17 switches to “Gentiles...called to be my own,” so it is also inconsistent, though the translator’s note explains the meaning. The TNIV corrects the inconsistency by rendering the text as “a people for his name...Gentiles who bear my name.”

LORD in that day and will become my people.” Other relevant passages include Isaiah 9:1–7; 42:1, 6–7; 45:22–23; 49:6; 55:3, 5; 60:3, and Malachi 1:11 (see also Rom 11:11).

At this point James selects one of the prophets to quote: “The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written” (Acts 15:15). He opens the quotation by replacing the original “in that day” with “after this I will return.” I believe James understands very well the context and meaning of Amos. But he is interpreting as he quotes, showing that he believes Amos will be fulfilled at some time future to the Jerusalem Council, and also after the Lord Jesus returns.<sup>46</sup> James understands that the Church finds itself living in a span of time which is between the judgments poured out on the nation of Israel and the restoration of that nation. One fact we can draw from the initial part of the quote is that James did not intend to quote exactly word for word. It was not necessary that he do so to convey his point; in fact, with some interpretation intermixed he could make his point even better.

Amos does not address the present era per se. He was basically only concerned with far future events in this paragraph of his prophecy. James recognizes this in his quote and addresses the fact that David’s tabernacle will be rebuilt after the Lord returns and that the resulting kingdom will rule over the Edomites and Gentiles. The Gentiles will be called by the name of God, indicating possession and a spiritual relationship.

But if the quote has to do with the future, which part of the quote is James emphasizing for its present relevance? It seems fairly clear that the load-bearing point is the phrase “the Gen-

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<sup>46</sup>Toussaint, “Acts,” p. 395 distinguishes two interpretations here. “After this” could refer to the original sense of Amos, namely in that day, “after the Tribulation.” Or, it could refer to temporally “after” the time when James’ was speaking, after the “at the first” of Acts 15:14. In either case, there is not much difference, for the predicted events still have not happened as of this writing. Since the Lord’s return is the major time marker given in James’ quote, he definitely is fixing the time of the events after the present age.

tiles who bear my name.” This phrase connects back to verse 14 and the similar phrase “for his name” and also justifies the present calling of Gentiles to salvation.<sup>47</sup> While the quote gives us some choice information about what will happen in the future, the main point that James is making is that the Gentiles will be called by Gods’ name in that future age. There is therefore no difficulty with the fact that some Gentiles are called by God’s name in the present age!<sup>48</sup>

In neither the Hebrew or LXX is this part of the quote at issue in the textual debate. That is not to say that the rest of the quote is totally irrelevant. If the verb was “to possess” rather than “to seek,” James’ case might be slightly weaker or slightly less “universal.” But given our earlier argument that “possess” cannot eliminate spiritual overtones to the kingdom rule that is predicted in Amos, this is hardly a significant point.<sup>49</sup> James probably had more familiarity with the LXX and knew that whichever version he quoted would not alter his point.

According to this interpretation, it is not necessary to load the term “remnant” with all the salvific ideas that attend it in the Old Testament. It can very simply refer to the physical survi-

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<sup>47</sup>John B. Polhill, *Acts*, in vol. 26 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), p. 329–30. However, I cannot accept Polhill’s covenant conclusion that Jews and Gentiles make up the restored people of God, the true Israel.

<sup>48</sup>Aldrich makes the same point when he says, “James’ reasoning would then be this: The prophets anticipate a future dealing with the Gentiles and so this present visitation of God to the Gentiles is not out of harmony with the divine attitude toward them. The quotation serves to voice God’s approval of the present extension of salvation to the Gentiles although it is fulfilled by a future work among them.” See Aldrich, “The Interpretation of Acts 15:13-18,” pp. 317–23.

<sup>49</sup>Thus I do not think that James consciously chose the LXX over the Hebrew because it more clearly supported his point. An argument can be made that if James had quoted the original Hebrew text exactly, he would have defended his point even more clearly and authoritatively. Either text would have served the point. Making the same point is William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), p. 73. McCabe takes a different view, “James simply cites the LXX because it most clearly supports his defense of Peter’s ministry to the Gentiles.” See McCabe, “Hebrew Exegesis of Amos,” p. 117. Polhill, *Acts*, p. 329 fn 93 concurs: “James’s argument is best carried by the Septuagint text.” My response is that since the important point has to do with the Gentiles being “called by my name,” it does not seem to be very significant which version James chose to quote.

vors of the tribulation period. English translations are somewhat split on whether the “and” of “and all the Gentiles” should be translated exegetically as “even.” If translated as “even” then the text would equate the remnant with the Gentiles. This idea is seen as seriously flawed by some,<sup>50</sup> though if “remnant” is taken in its unloaded sense, this interpretation is not a problem. More problematic is that Amos clearly sees two different groups of people; if James only sees one group then this is yet another inconsistency with his use of Amos. But I have argued that his source, the LXX, shows enough internal inconsistencies to demonstrate that it is corrupted rather than the Hebrew text. Also, James’ quote is consistent with other OT prophecies. The weight of James’ point does not rest on whether there is one group or two, but taking it as a single group does strongly emphasize his point that it is the rest of humankind, that is, *Gentiles*, who will be called by God’s name and who will seek the Lord.<sup>51</sup> This would suffice to close the debate as to whether Gentiles were to be included in God’s program. Obviously the answer would be yes.

### *Two Basic Approaches*

There are two general flavors of explanations given for the use of Amos in Acts 15. One

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<sup>50</sup>Braun, “James’ Use of Amos at the Jerusalem Council,” p. 120.

<sup>51</sup>While not totally germane to the issue addressed in the paper, the reader might wonder who genuinely seeks the Lord. Perhaps this theological question is a further reason to reject the LXX reading of Amos 9. After all, Rom 3:11 says that there is no one who seeks God. However, we have to contend with many uses of the verb שָׁרַץ which are used of people genuinely (in whatever sense) seeking God. Note, for instance: Isa. 11:10 concerns Gentiles genuinely seeking God; Deut 12:5 concerns seeking the Lord’s house; Psalm 119:2 and Lam. 3:25 of an individual genuinely seeking God; Jer. 29:13 of the Israelites genuinely seeking God after the Babylonian captivity in fulfillment of Deut 4:29; 1 Chron. 28:9 of David’s exhortation to Solomon to seek God; 2 Chron. 15:12–13 of Israel agreeing to seek God and eliminate those who refused to do so, following the Azariah’s exhortation to Asa to seek God (2 Chron. 15:2); and Hosea 3:5 in which the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God. Seeking that is directed away from God is mentioned in several texts as well (Deut 12:30, Isa 58:2, Ezra 4:2, Psalm 10:4). The verb שָׁרַץ is also used in this way. Consider the texts 2 Chron 20:4, Hos 3:5, 5:6, Zeph 1:6, 2:3, 8:21, 8:22. Notwithstanding, the unregenerate heart will not truly seek after God completely on its own. This implies that the environment established under the umbrella of David’s booth will be superb indeed. Many will truly know the Lord (Jer 31:34) and many will seek Him, at least in some external fashion.

is to say that the text in Amos is fulfilled in the church, that the kingdom has been inaugurated.<sup>52</sup> Against this view is that James did not say Amos is now fulfilled; he simply said that the prophets *agree* (συμφωνέω) with the situation at hand—there is a consistency between what they say and what is happening now. Furthermore, James modifies the quotation slightly at the beginning to show that he understands the fulfillment to come *after* the Jerusalem council, and in fact after the Lord Jesus Christ returns.<sup>53</sup> Thus there is no warrant from this text to say that the kingdom is now established or that the church is the fulfillment of the “booth of David.” This would totally change the meaning of “booth” from its OT context.

The other explanation does not suggest that Amos’ prophecy is fulfilled. Rather, James is using Amos to show that God has a plan for the Gentiles in the future and that future plan has present implications. This view is to be preferred. James knows that the times of the Gentiles are not yet finished (Rom 1:25); he knows that the kingdom has not yet been restored, and in fact that he cannot specify the time in which it will be restored (Acts 1:6–7). He certainly knows that Jesus has not yet returned. But he also has learned that Jewish-exclusivism is not allowed based on the OT prophets. The Gentiles will be in the future kingdom. There is no reason therefore to exclude them from the church just because they are not Jewish, since God has given to them the same Spirit he poured out on the Jewish Christians. Sunukjian writes that James knows, based on Amos and the other prophets, “that when the promised kingdom would come, the Gentiles will

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<sup>52</sup>Hubbard, *Joel & Amos*, p. 242.

<sup>53</sup>Aldrich makes the same two points very clearly. “Thus James introduces a harmony of principle. For God now to take out of the Gentiles a people for His name agrees in principle with that yet-future gracious visitation” (Aldrich, “The Interpretation of Acts 15:13-18,” p. 320). “Second, there is the harmony of time. James changes the quotation from Amos...so as to bring the Old Testament prophecy of a restored Israel into a temporal harmony with what God is doing at the present...” (p. 323).

share in it as Gentiles and not as quasi-Jews.” He continues,

Since this was God’s millennial purpose, James concluded that the church should not require Gentiles to relinquish their identity and live as Jews. James was not saying the church fulfills... Amos 9:11–12. He was saying that since Gentiles will be saved in the yet-to-come Millennium, they need not become Jews in the Church Age.<sup>54</sup>

Kaiser’s “promise theology” attempts to walk the line between the two approaches outlined above by suggesting that the promise of Amos has not yet, but will still be, fulfilled to Israel, that David’s booth does not represent the church, but that at the same time the promises of the OT are enlarged and directly apply to the Gentiles today.<sup>55</sup> This approach is hardly distinguishable from the covenant theology “fulfillment” approach, though it is premillennial. Many covenant theologians would explain the passage in an amillennial or postmillennial framework.<sup>56</sup>

### **Theological and Hermeneutical Issues**

What we learned in the previous section was that James’ point at the Jerusalem council was not at all jeopardized by his use of the LXX. The message was loud and clear. Now, we must answer the remaining questions that we posed earlier, namely have we compromised the doctrine

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<sup>54</sup>Sunukjian, “Amos,” p. 1451. Kaiser objects to this type of interpretation, saying “it must then be admitted that the OT citation had no direct bearing on the question at stake.” See Kaiser, “The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of the Gentiles,” p. 105. In response, we should note that it is not at all necessary that the time of the fulfillment of Amos need to correspond to the time to which it is applied. Just because the text has no *direct* bearing does not mean that it has *no* bearing at all.

<sup>55</sup>Kaiser, “The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of the Gentiles,” p. 111. Finley approvingly cites Kaiser on this and says “Thus, the use of Amos in Acts may be regarded as not just an illustration but as a fulfillment, yet only as a stage in the progressive fulfillment of the whole—the final and complete stage or fulfillment being still future.” See Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, p. 327 [p. 285 in the Biblical Studies Press version]. See also Billy K. Smith, *Amos*, p. 168.

<sup>56</sup>For instance, refer to Robert B. Strimple’s chapter on Amillennialism in Darrell L. Bock, *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), pp. 96–7. In addition, see Anthony A. Hoekema’s chapter on Amillennialism in Robert G. Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p. 185. Hoekema sounds somewhat postmillennial when he writes, “...it is obvious that the thousand-year reign of Revelation 20:4-6 must occur before and *not after* the Second Coming of Christ” (p. 160; emphasis original). See also Niehaus, *Amos*, p. 492.

of inspiration or a consistent literal hermeneutic?

### *Inspiration*

Earlier in the paper I made two assertions that surely alerted the reader to some issues with the doctrine of inspiration. Those two assertions had to do with the fact that James' quote of Amos is inexact, and that there was apparently a copyist's error in the source quoted. Before addressing these two issues in particular, we should note that whatever position one takes on the textual transmission problem, this issue with inspiration must be faced. If the error is in the LXX, then we have to deal with the problem in Acts. If the error is in the transmission of the Hebrew text, then we can only assert that the original must have been correct, but we have little or no extant evidence to back up that assertion.<sup>57</sup> But this solution still leaves us with a corrupt transmitted Hebrew text of Amos in these verses.

First, consider the inexact nature of the quotation. No matter which version of the text one takes (possess or seek), it has to be admitted that James' quote is inexact, starting as it does with a mention of the Lord's return, and slightly different time words. My view is that this is not a problem in the least. I can hold this view with no fear of damage to the doctrine of inspiration because the doctrine does not require a journal-article level of accuracy in quotations. The quotes need not be word-for-word and footnoted to be valid, accurate, an inerrant. It is just simply not an error to paraphrase something or give an interpretive gloss. Modern preachers do this all the time without twisting or altering the meaning of the text. Inspiration simply guarantees that the written product of the Bible is just exactly what God wanted it to be—in words, in message, etc.

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<sup>57</sup>It is not completely invalid to resort to this argument, but it should be used quite rarely, i.e. in cases like 1 Sam. 13:1.

The message very clearly gets across that there is a future restoration of the nation in which the Gentiles will participate. This has present ramifications which James highlights.

Perhaps the more difficult issue with regard to inspiration is that there is apparently an error in the source that James quotes, the LXX. Biblical writers often quote extra-Biblical sources (Acts 17:28, Titus 1:12, Gen 3:1) and if there are errors or bad philosophies in the quoted material these do not shake our belief in the conservative doctrine of inspiration. But the Acts quote is from a source that is supposed to be Biblical! I think there is a two-fold explanation for this conundrum. First, I have demonstrated that the LXX does convey the basic message of Amos. The kingdom will mean that the Israelites possess the nations, and also that those nations will be able to seek the Lord, messages both amply confirmed in the other OT prophets. So James is not quoting a totally wrong source. Second, it seems that if we demanded the LXX quote to be exactly word-for-word, then we would be ascribing inspiration and inerrancy to that translation. But the doctrine of inspiration does not apply directly to translations or copies. The way the situation stands, we can at least see that an imperfect translation can be used in an authoritative manner.

### *Hermeneutics*

Another important concern that arises in this study is the issue of the kingdom of God and what principles of interpretation should be applied to determine whether the kingdom is now operative or not. Should we appeal to *sensus plenior* and say that Acts expands on the meaning of the Amos passage and adds critical new revelation to it? Kaiser attempts to avoid this problem by saying that the expansion of meaning came when the Abrahamic promises were re-stated to

David,<sup>58</sup> and not at the New Testament. While an in-depth investigation into the whole issue of *sensus plenior* cannot be made here, suffice it to say that this author believes that an Old Testament text has a static meaning. It means now what it always meant, otherwise there are no controls on what it might mean, or what meaning an interpreter might find. There are not multiple levels of fulfillment that carry different senses (literal and spiritual).<sup>59</sup>

A related hermeneutical issue is this: should we assume that since James brings up the passage that he is automatically suggesting that Amos has been fulfilled? McComiskey thinks so:

One may assume that that kingdom has been established in some way. It is invisible now but will appear in glorious power when Christ, David's greater Son, returns. If this passage in Amos predicted only a future inclusion of Gentiles in the millennial kingdom, it is difficult to understand why James would have appealed to it for support of Gentile admission to the first-century church... James understood the restored Davidic monarchy to be represented, at least in its invisible sense, in the church in his time.<sup>60</sup>

His point represents a problematic hermeneutic. Just because James appeals to Amos, who does clearly teach the future inclusion of Gentiles in the millennial kingdom, this does not mean that the kingdom is established. Quotation or allusion does not imply fulfillment! James could, as I have argued, appeal to that text to say that if they will be included in the future, they can be included now.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Kaiser, "The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of the Gentiles," p. 110.

<sup>59</sup>This position of having two fulfillments (literal and spiritual) is taken in William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), p. 308. This is basically the progressive dispensational interpretation.

<sup>60</sup>Thomas Edward McComiskey, *Amos*, in vol. 7 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), p. 330.

<sup>61</sup>Zuck notes that this passage confirms that a New Testament event is in agreement with an Old Testament principle. See Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1991), p. 261.

### **Conclusion**

Admittedly, James presents us with a knotty problem. The textual, interpretive, and theological challenges are significant. But in conclusion, a satisfactory case has been made that:

- There is no solid evidence that the Hebrew text of Amos must be emended;
- James used the Bible current in his day, the LXX, even though it had some problems;
- There was some textual corruption in the LXX which was carried into James' quote;
- James did not make an exact quotation of Amos but instead made a loose, interpretive quotation in which he draws on Amos as well as "the words of the prophets" which agree with the situation at hand;
- Acts contains an accurate record of James' speech and shows that James was faithful to the message of Amos as well as the prophets as a whole;
- James' point was not jeopardized by errors in the LXX, particularly since the theological weight of his point rested on the phrase in Amos regarding the Gentiles as "called by God's name," a part of the text in Amos not at all in doubt;
- James was not putting the official stamp of inspiration on the LXX;
- James' emphasis was on the inclusion of Gentiles in God's future program, and that fact implied that there was no need for Gentiles to keep the Law presently;
- The meaning of Amos was that Israel would possess Edom and the Gentile nations;
- In Israel's ruling over or possessing of the nations, a "religious" environment would be established in Messiah's kingdom in which the Gentiles would seek God.
- There is no difficulty in having an age intervening between Israel's historic dispersion and its future restoration, in which age God calls out for himself a people from the Gentile nations; and

- The conclusions presented above do not damage a conservative doctrine of inspiration or a consistently literal hermeneutic.

In the end, the interpreter can confidently assert that the textual and interpretive problems in James' use of Amos do not require the surrender of a high view of Scripture. As far as textual issues go, it is the LXX, not the Hebrew text, which has an error. But this error does not contradict the meaning of the MT in Amos. The load-bearing point of the text ("called by my name") is not at all in question. As far as interpretive issues are concerned, James makes it clear through the use of the phrase "after this I will return" that the fulfillment of Amos awaits the second coming of Christ, thus harmonizing the OT prophets with the NT revelation of the church according to the dispensational understanding of Scripture. The presence of Gentiles in the future kingdom as Gentiles supports their present inclusion in the church apart from becoming Jewish proselytes.

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**Comments**

I did not completely cross check all the Greek and Hebrew against print sources. This is why I cite BibleWorks in the Bibliography so it is clear where I got the texts. Time did not permit me to go through and check the electronic texts against the printed text.