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James’ Use of Amos 9:11–12 in Acts 15 in the Current Debate

Ranko Stefanovic

The Bible of the early Christians was the Hebrew Scriptures, which were, for them, the only inspired and sacred revelation of God. The authoritative Old Testament writings were the source of their beliefs and played a key role in shaping their preaching and teaching. Joseph Woods observed: “The New Testament it makes plain that, in the view of the early followers of Jesus, there was an inescapable connection between him and the Old Testament.” The abundance of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament proves the accuracy of such a statement. In the last decades, an increasing number of New Testament scholars have turned their attention to the theological significance of the Bible regarding its unity as well as the interrelationship between the two testaments.

The well-known axiom of Augustine, quamquam et in Vetere Novum lateat, et in Novo Vetus pateat (“The New Testament is concealed in the Old and the Old lies revealed in the New”), finds its counterpart in Schodde’s statement, written close to a century ago, “The New Testament is altogether without a historical and religious foundation without the Old, and the Old is

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2 Augustine, Quaestiones in Heptateuchum 2, 73 (PL 34:623).
incomplete and unfinished without the New.”  

He then added that this signifies not only a prime hermeneutical principle but also an important fact with reference to the interrelationship of Bible books.

In contemporary scholarship the question of the relationship between the Old and New Testament is of great significance for the interpretation of the Bible. Some scholars have pointed out that many uses of the Old Testament material in the New seem unrelated to the meaning intended by the original writer. They have tried to show that some quotations of Old Testament prophecies “give the impression that unwarranted liberties were taken with the Old Testament text in the light of its context.”

One of the passages commonly referred to in order to prove such an alleged misuse of the Hebrew Scriptures in the New Testament is Acts 15:16–18a. This passage deals with the prophecy from Amos 9:11–12 quoted by James at the council in Jerusalem. Michael A. Braun argued that “Acts 15:6–29 is a crucial passage in the development of the New Testament Church, and Amos 9:11–12 played a most strategic part within the Acts passage.”

The focus of this paper is James's use of Amos' prophecy at the Jerusalem council as a case study of the use of the Old Testament in the New. The two passages—Amos 9:11–12 and its counterpart Acts 15:16–18a—will be compared. Then, the passage from Acts 15 will be analyzed in its own right to find a likely answer regarding the method the early church used to apply Old Testament prophecies to their life and mission.

The Historical Setting

Acts 15 reports that the Jerusalem Council assembled in approximately A.D. 49 to discuss the issues regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church. The Gospel had spread throughout Judea and outside of Palestine, resulting in the conversion of Gentiles to the Christian message. The need for the council was raised in the church of Antioch when “some men came down from Judea” (15:1) and questioned the validity of the conversion of Gentiles

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4 Ibid.
to Christianity without practicing Judaism, particularly circumcision. The young church was threatened with division, so a request was made to the church leadership in Jerusalem to look into the matter and come to a final decision. The need for the council and its authority was evident because the problem was not confined only to the Antioch area, but threatened the entire church. Therefore, the council was an event of great importance for the early church.

The council began with profuse debate. After lengthy discussion, the assembly was silenced by Peter who rose and gave a testimony recalling his visit to the house of Cornelius (15:7–11; cf. chap. 10). He reiterated to the audience that the conversion of the Gentiles was initiated by God himself (cf. Acts 11:4–17). The Holy Spirit was then given to the Gentiles in the same manner as to the Jews at Pentecost (11:15). As a result of this argument, Peter was able to articulate persuasively his firm conviction that through him God had led the church to accept the Gentiles without requiring them to be circumcised or keep other rituals of the Mosaic Law. This occasioned an opportunity for Paul and Barnabas to proclaim “what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles” (15:12).

The climax of the council was the speech delivered by James (15:13–21), who was a part of the group of the elders and apostles (vv. 6, 22). At the very outset, James pointed to Peter’s experience with Cornelius by which the door of salvation opened to the Gentiles. In order to convince the audience, James quoted Scripture for support.

The conversion of the Gentiles was in agreement with the words of the

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prophets: “With this the words of the Prophets agree (συµφωνούσιν), just as it is written” (v. 15). At this point he used Amos 9:11–12 as scriptural support, quoting it with minor alteration (Acts 15:16–18). This prophecy from Amos was the crux of James’ argument. By appealing to it, he argued that Scripture confirmed Peter’s ministry in Cornelius’ home as well as God’s desire for the Gentiles to become a part of his believing people.

Next, James made a proposal to the church that they “should not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles” (v. 19) insisting that the Gentile converts should not be required to be circumcised, except to “abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood” (v. 20). A number of scholars have argued that these four items conformed to the legal prohibition for the aliens living in Israel in Lev 17–18. Richard M. Davidson has shown that these four items follow both the list and the same order of the four major legal prohibitions for the resident alien (gēr) specified in Lev 17–18.

The council unanimously accepted James’ proposal. The decision, known as the Apostolic Decree, was written in a form letter and sent to the churches of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia by two messengers—Judas and Silas—chosen and commissioned by the council. In such a way, the issue of inclusion and the status of Gentiles in the Christian church were once for ever put to rest with the Decree.

Acts 15:16–18a in the Current Debate

It seems obvious that the passage from Amos played a significant role in the decision of the Jerusalem Council. At least, the apostles and elders were convinced that the decision proposed by James and adopted by the church was according to Scripture, i.e., announced beforehand by God. As they set out to fulfill their mission, they understood that God intended, according to the Old Testament promise, to gather into one people believers from many nations. Stephen G. Wilson stated that with this, “the problem of the Gentiles and the Gentile mission is once and for all decided at a meeting in

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13 Larkin, Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics, 228.
Jerusalem of all the main figures of the early Church."  

However, James’ quote of Amos’ prophecy at the council has occasioned vehement scholarly debates. George H. C. Macgregor wrote more than a half-century ago that chapter 15 of Acts has “raised more problems than any other in the book of Acts. Every kind of error and confusion has been attributed to the author, perhaps the least culpable being that he has misunderstood completely the nature of the dispute.” While most modern commentators acknowledge that the first Jerusalem Council was an event of great historical significance and importance for the Christian church during its formative years, they are, however, divided, among other things, on the credibility of Luke’s report with regard to what really happened at the council. Yet, they generally all agree that a decisive point at the council was the speech of James and his use of Amos 9:11–12 that eventually settled the council debate.

While it is recognized that Acts 15:13–21a is a crucial passage in the development of the Christian church, Walter C. Kaiser wondered in 1977 “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.” Since then, several in-depth studies on the subject have appeared in journals and books, and some various hypotheses have emerged regarding James’ citation of Amos’ prophecy at the Jerusalem Council. The majority of the scholars belong to two camps: those who deny and those who accept the authenticity of James speech as recorded in Acts 15:13–21.

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Critical scholarship in general views the passage of Acts 15:13–21 as the work of a certain Greek editor, most likely Luke (or some other person), who either composed the whole speech with the quotation from Amos21 or was dependent on an existing Hellenistic Christian exegetical tradition.22 They have argued that James as a Jewish Christian in Jerusalem would not have used a Septuagint text that differed from the Hebrew original as a proof text for his argument.23 Thus, for instance, Ernst Haenchen argued that it is “incontrovertibly clear that James’ speech, too, is not a historical report but a composition of the Hellenistic Gentile Christian Luke,” and further concluded: “It is not James but Luke who is speaking here.”24 F. W. Filson believed that the actual wording of every speech in Acts is the work of Luke. In his reporting of the position taken by James, Luke wrote in Greek; therefore, he naturally used the Greek translation of the Amos passage.25 On the other hand, J. C. O’Neill, who argued that James’ speech “was the work of a Greek-speaking writer, who could just as well be Luke himself,” thinks that the citation from Amos is not from the LXX, but a free and independent translation from the Hebrew.26 In such a way, “James was arguing that Scripture had foretold that the restoration of the tabernacle of David would be accompanied by the chosen people’s possession of all nations called by the Lord’s name, in other words, that when God sent the Messiah to Israel, the Gentiles God had designated would flock to put themselves under the Son of David’s rule.”27


24 Haenchen, ibid.

25 Filson, Three Crucial Decades, 79.


Having surveyed the usages of the Old Testament texts in the book of Acts, Dom Jacques Dupont concluded that the speech of James was one more example of the use of the Septuagint text in the Lucan fashion.\(^{28}\) He further argued that Luke was dependent on the method of scriptural interpretation practiced in the early church, which was free of any sort of allegorical exegesis.\(^{29}\) A practice of messianic exegesis, based on the literal exegesis, would be rather in keeping with the practice of the rabbis.\(^{30}\)

Earl Richard reached a similar conclusion. He asserted that Acts 15:16–18a shows Luke’s creativeness in quoting the Old Testament. While very faithful to his LXX source, Luke, in his view, imposes upon the quotations some stylistic, thematic, or manifestly theological modification; and secondly, the scriptural text itself has had significant influence upon the composition of Acts.\(^{31}\) Although he found that “Luke’s knowledge of the OT is indeed profound,” he was not certain “whether Luke has chosen carefully his OT texts to reinforce his ideas and his view of history, or whether the composition results, in large part, from a serious reading of the Jewish Scriptures and meditation upon their meaning for the spread of Christianity.”\(^{32}\)

More recently, Richard Bauckham advocated a middle ground in treating James’ speech in Acts 15. While accepting the historicity of the Jerusalem Council, he concluded that Luke took the material from the original, longer letter of the Jerusalem Council to compose James’ speech in the manner of the first-century Jewish exegetical practice.\(^{33}\) Although not sure, he concluded that “the probability that the substance of James’ speech derives from a source close to James himself is high.”\(^{34}\) He argued that on the basis of what we know about Jewish exegetical method, “especially from the study of the Qumran pesharim, the peculiar text-form of conflated quotation in Acts 15:16–18 requires to be studied and understood as a product of a skilled exegetical work.”\(^{35}\) Such a study leads, in his view, to an inevitable conclusion that “Luke has accurately, if rather summarily, preserved the exegetical basis on which the Jerusalem church, under James’ leadership,

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 155.
\(^{32}\) Ibid.
\(^{34}\) Ibid., 184.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., 155–156.
was able to endorse Paul’s Gentile mission, with the important proviso embodied in the Apostolic Creed.”

Those who hold to the authenticity of James’ speech follow two approaches to Acts 15:16–18a: advocating the dispensationalist interpretation of the passage or adhering to the historical-grammatical interpretation and reject the dispensational interpretation of the passage from Acts 15. A representative of the former might be Willard M. Aldrich who argued that the literal fulfillment of the Amos’ prophecy would be realized in future renewed national dealings with Israel. The interpretation of the text includes, first, that God is doing a new thing: calling out of the Gentiles a people for his name, and second, that after this, God will return to earth to fulfill his covenant with David.

The dispensationalist view has been seriously contested and dismissed by scholars. Thus Royce Dickinson noted that “the grammatico-exegesis . . . provides no support for dispensationalism and actually militates against such theology.” Walter C. Kaiser found two passages, Amos 9:11–12 and Acts 15:13–18a, to be most appropriate in addressing some insoluble controversies, such as the relationship between the Old and New Testament, exegetical methods New Testament writers employed in seeking the Old Testament support, the relationship between Israel and Christian church, and the question of whether the prophets envisaged the Church or even the salvation of the Gentiles during the Church age in their writings.

Kaiser further noted that scholars differ mainly on the question of the significance and meaning of the Old Testament quotation used by James to resolve the issue under debate. In other words, did James indicate by quoting Amos 9:11–12 that the mission to the Gentiles was a fulfillment of the Amos prophecy—a part of the divine revelation to the Old Testament prophet? His

38 Aldrich, “Interpretation,” 317.
39 Ibid., 322.
41 Dickinson, “Theology,” 82.
own exegetical analysis of Amos 9 led him to a conclusion that “James used a plain, simple and straightforward hermeneutic when he appealed to Amos.” Here Kaiser tried to find middle ground to reconcile two systems of interpretation, covenant theology and dispensationalism. For him it was the ἐπαγγέλια, the full promise of God. He rejected the possibility that the “tabernacle of David” was a type of the Christian Church which simply transferred Amos’ national hopes into spiritual realities of the gospel era. The only safe method to obtain a full biblical picture of a unified people and program of God, which includes both Israel and the Church, was, in his view, to “hold its finger on the Biblical text and context while it talks through these complex issues.”

Michael A. Braun held a similar view. In his article, he analyzed Acts 15 from both textual and theological perspectives. He noted that “James’ citation of Amos 9:11–12 is clarified by the remnant concept in early Jewish Christianity.” Two distinct groups are included in the prophecy, “the remnant of men” (believing Jews) and “all the Gentiles who are called by my name.” However, he opposed the view that the believing Jews would have to be considered as the “tabernacle of David” and that the Gentiles be included in the remnant. Gentiles are not included, they are the remnant. The “tabernacle of David” is the coming kingdom of the Messiah. At the time of his coming, according to Amos, both the righteous remnant and the elect among the Gentiles will seek God. The believing Gentiles will share the riches of the restored Israel. He rightly concluded that

in the Church when Jews and Gentiles are considered together they are the “people of God,” an ontological union to which the NT gives ample witness. But when considered separately the believing Gentile was never compelled to live like a Jew, and the believing Jews alone have the distinction of being called a righteous remnant. James preserves Amos’ dichotomy even while he pleads for the inclusion of the Gentiles in the fellowship of the Gospel.

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44 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 120.
47 Ibid., 120.
48 Ibid., 121.
David M. King endeavored to show that James does quote from the LXX and that this version of the passage from Amos is “based upon a flawed reading of the Hebrew.” He concluded, after observing the three versions (MT, LXX, and the NT), that James’ use of the passage does not violate the intended meaning of the prophet.\(^{50}\)

More recently, in an extensive study of the two texts (Amos 9:11–12 and Acts 15:16–18a), James A Meek has reached, somehow, a similar conclusion.\(^{51}\) For him, James’ quotation was basically from the LXX. “Nevertheless, neither the LXX nor the citation distort the sense of the original words of Amos. Despite frequent assertions to the contrary, there is no substantial evidence that the citation contains allusions to other OT texts or that the argument in Acts 15 depends particularly on the LXX form of the text.”\(^ {52}\)

While among modern scholars there is a general consensus on the importance of Amos 9 in the decisions of the Jerusalem Council, much attention has been paid to the interpretive method of James (or Luke) to the Amos passage.

### Parallels among the Texts

The comparison of Acts 15:16–18a with its counterparts in the Greek Old Testament (LXX) and the Hebrew Bible (MT) (see chart, next page) clearly shows that, on one hand, James’ citation agrees in meaning, and is also, for the most part, in verbatim agreement with the LXX text.\(^ {53}\) On the other, however, the citation in Acts apparently differs, to a certain degree, from the LXX text of Amos.

As it can be observed, the chief deviations are found in the beginning and the end of the two texts. In the opening clause of the citation, James replaces the original ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ (“in that day”) of the LXX by μετὰ τὰ ἀναστρέψας καὶ ἀνανοικοδομήσω (“I will return and I will rebuild”) as an substitute for ἀναστήσω (“I will raise up”) in Amos 9.

It appears that in using μετὰ τὰ ἀναστρέψας καὶ ἀνανοικοδομήσω in connection with the restoration of the David’s dynasty, James conflated

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\(^{51}\) Meek, Gentile Mission, 56–94.

\(^{52}\) Ibid, 131.

\(^{53}\) As Haenchen, (Acts of the Apostles, 448) and others observed (e.g., Dickinson, “Theology,” 73; for a more specified comparison of the two texts see Richard, “The Creative Use,” 44, and Dickinson, “Theology,” 73–79).
Amos' prophecy with at least two other Old Testament prophetic texts. The first one might have been Jeremiah 12:15–16 LXX: καὶ ἔσται μετὰ τὸ ἐκβαλεῖν με αὐτούς ἐπιστρέψω . . . καὶ κατοικιάδ αὐτούς . . . οἰκοδομήσωντα . . . (“and it shall be after I have cast them out, that I will return . . . and cause them to dwell . . . they shall be built”). The second could be Hosea 3:5: καὶ μετὰ τὰ υπκαταστάσαντος Ἰσραήλ καὶ ἐπιστρέφουσιν κόριν τὸν θεόν αὐτῶν καὶ Δαυίδ τὸν βασιλέα αὐτῶν· (“And after these things, the sons of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king”).

The verbal and thematic parallels between the two texts are very strong. Both associate the turning of God’s people to seek God with the restoration of Davidic rule. One might also observe that the verb ἀναστρέψω is used by James both with reference to

**Comparisons of Acts 15:16–18a, Amos 9:11–12 LXX, and Amos 9:11–12 MT:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acts 15:16–18a</th>
<th>Amos 9:11–12 LXX</th>
<th>Amos 9:11–12 MT</th>
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</thead>
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<td>μετὰ ταῦτα</td>
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<td>בְּנִיתֶהוּ</td>
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<td>ἀνοικοδομήσω</td>
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<tr>
<td>τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ</td>
<td>τὴν σκηνὴν Δαυὶδ</td>
<td>ἔκαστον θῶν</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>τὴν πεπτωκεῖαν</td>
<td>καθὼς ηὲ ἡμέραι τοῦ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ ~ ~ ~</td>
<td>καὶ ἀνοικοδομήσω τὰ</td>
<td>καθὼς ηὲ ἡμέραι τοῦ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>~ ~ ~ ~</td>
<td>πεπτωκότα αὐτῆς</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>~ ~ ~ ~</td>
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<td>αἰώνιον</td>
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<tr>
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<td>~ ~ ~ ~</td>
<td>καθὼς ηὲ ἡμέραι τοῦ</td>
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<tr>
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<td>καθὼς ηὲ ἡμέραι τοῦ</td>
<td>καθὼς ηὲ ἡμέραι τοῦ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

54 Archer (Archer and Chirichigno, Old Testament Quotations, 153) maintained that ἀναστρέψω καὶ ἀνοικοδοµήσω brings out that Hebr. יְבַן means “I will rebuild” in Amos 9, not simply “I will build.” James thus “makes clear and explicit what is implied by the Amos text.” He also pointed out that the first ἀναστήσω in verse 11, which James substitutes with ἀναστρέψω καὶ ἀνοικοδοµήσω, brings out that Hebr. יְבַן here means “I will re-establish.”

55 I am indebted to Bauckham for this insight (“James and Gentiles,” 180–181).
James’ Use of Amos 9:11–12

After these things I will return and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the gentiles who are called by my name,” says the Lord who makes these things known from long ago. (NASB)

“In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the ancient days, so that the remnant of mankind and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek [me],” says the Lord God who does these things. (my translation)

God’s visitation (Acts 15:14) and the turning of the nations/Gentiles to God (v. 19).56 “In effect God returns to his people (the Jews) so that the Gentiles may turn to him (ἀναστρέψω καὶ ἐπιστρέψω).”57

The reason for substituting ἀναστρέψω (“I will raise”) with ἀνοικοδομήσω (“I will rebuild”) twice might be theological. Richard noted that the transitive use of ἀνιστημι is very rare in the New Testament (about 14 times of which 9 occur in Acts). Except in three cases where it is used in relation to Deuteronomy 18:15 (raising up a prophet like Moses), the term is used regularly with reference to the resurrection of Christ. Thus, ἀνιστημι is for Luke a theological term, and is “therefore, replaced by the verb ‘rebuild’ which he finds more appropriate and one which he finds in his Old Testament source.”58

At the end, ὁ ποιῶν τὰ ταῦτα (“who is doing all these things”) is appended with γνωστὰ ἀπ’ αἰῶνος (“known from old”). Some scholars have suggested

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57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 47.
that this ending is borrowed from Isa 45:21 (ἅπα ἀρχὴς) by which James modified the concluding prepositional phrase ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς from Isaiah to ἀπ’ αἰῶνος⁵⁹.

Less significant differences can be seen as well. Some additions, such as ἂν and τὸν κύριον are made; but, on the other side, the phrase καθ’ αὐτὸν ἡμέρα τοῦ αἰῶνος (“as in the ancient days”) is omitted by James. Also, ἀνοικοδόμησο (“I will rebuild”) in Amos is substituted with ἀνορθώσω (“I will restore it”) in James.⁶⁰

The major deviation is clause ὅπως ἂν ἐκζητήσωσιν οἱ κατάλοιποι τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸν κύριον (“so that the rest of men may seek the Lord”) which differs from the MT which can be translated, “that they may possess the remnant of Edom” (יִירְשׁוּ לְמַעַן אֱדוֹם). The Hebrew text thus talks about the restoration of Israel which Yahweh would engender after the Exile. The Davidic line would be re-established and restored to its former glory and God’s people would “inherit what is left of Edom and other nations that will be called God’s people.”⁶¹ The Septuagint text, however, talks about the remnant of mankind and all the nations seeking the Lord in the restored Davidic kingdom. Edom now becomes the “all humanity.”⁶² However, both the Hebrew and Greek texts refer to “the nations called by my name” resulting in “a people for his name” in Acts 15:14.

It seems self-evident that in the LXX, the Hebrew word שִׁירִים (“to possess”) is replaced with שַׁר (“to seek”) due to the similarity of two letters; also, the exchange of וַיֵּשֶׁר for וַיִּשְׁרֵה involving only a change of vowels.⁶³ Thus οἱ κατάλοιποι has become the subject of ἐκζητήσωσιν,⁶⁴ stating that “the remnant (rest of the mankind) will seek,” where τὸν κύριον is introduced as the object of seeking.⁶⁵

Some scholars, such as Chain Rabin, have argued that the “MT would

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⁶⁰ The verb ἀνορθώσω appears only here in Acts together with the adjective ὀρθὸς which appears in 14:10. The both passages are related to the Gentiles. For a special meaning see Richard, “The Creative Use,” 48.
⁶⁴ Archer believed that the object marker וַיֵּשֶׁר, preceding יִירְשׁוּ (“remnants”) was originally וַיֵּשֶׁר or וַיִּשְׁרֵה and the final waw or yod was dropped out in the course of scribal transmission (Archer and Chirichigno, Old Testament Quotations, 155).
⁶⁵ See ibid.
James' Use of Amos 9:11–12

actually have supported the exegesis” offered by James. However, many scholars hold that the LXX (and Acts 15) might render the original and more authentic reading of the text. Jan de Waard argued that the text form of Amos cited in Acts 15 is “exactly identical with that of 4QFlor [1:12],” while Rabin suggested a common textual tradition between the citation in Acts 15 and that in CD 7:16. Archer argued that the clause: “in order that the rest of mankind might seek him” fits much better in the context of Amos 9 than a promise of taking possession of Edom. He also believed that the MT could have replaced the subject (“the rest of man”) with the object in the course of scribal transmission. He concluded that the rendering of the LXX (=NT) could be very accurate, and added: “we feel grateful that in this verse we have access to the earlier and more authentic reading: ‘In order that the remainder of mankind might seek him/me and all Gentiles (upon whom my name is called).’”

The Significance of James’ Use of Amos

This comparison of the text in Amos with the quotation in Acts 15 raises serious questions: was James’ interpretation of Amos’ prophecy contrary to the intended meaning of Amos? Was the decision of the Jerusalem Council based on a misapplication of an Old Testament prophecy?

James’ appeal to Scripture was for the purpose of showing that the conversion of the Gentiles was according to God’s plan announced earlier through the Old Testament prophets. This is evident from his opening statement (15:14) in which he spoke of God’s concern to take out of the Gentiles a people for his name (λαβεῖν ἐξ ἑθνῶν λαὸν τῷ ὑνόμῳτι υἱοῦ,).

The phrase “for his name” means for himself. The phrase “people for his

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70 See note 60.
71 Ibid., 155.
72 See Dah, “People,” 320–323; Keener argued that the phrase “over whom my name is
name” occurs neither in the Hebrew Bible or the Septuagint; however, it is a common usage in the Palestinian Targum⁷³ which suggests that James used an expression well known in his day.

In the LXX, nations or Gentiles are ἔθνη (Heb. “ PEOPLE”) and stands in contrast to λαός (Heb. עַם; “people”), the term applied exclusively to Israel as the people of God chosen from other nations: “You are a holy people [λαός] to the Lord your God, and the Lord your God has chosen you . . . of all the nations [ἔθνη] on the face of the earth”⁷⁴ (Deut. 14:2 LXX; also 26:18–19; 32:8–9). Luke himself constantly uses the word λαός with reference to the Jews as the people of God (cf., Luke 1:68, 77; 2:32; 7:16; Acts 7:34; 13:17).⁷⁵ In the Old Testament, Israel is the people “called by the name of the Lord” (Deut. 28:10; 2 Chron. 7:14; cf. Isa 43:7; Jer. 14:9; Dan 9:19), whereas Gentiles are “those who were not called by Thy name” (Isa. 63:19).⁷⁶ However, in his opening statement, James refers to the Gentiles as God’s λαός for God’s name in the full meaning of the word.⁷⁷ “Converted Gentiles belong to God, just as Israel belonged to God.”⁷⁸

It appears that behind this opening statement (v. 14) stands the prophecy of Zechariah 2:11 [15] LXX which speaks of many Gentiles (ἔθνη πολλὰ) who will take refuge in the Lord in the final days; they will become God’s λαός and will dwell in the restored Zion. And James made it clear that the time prophesied by the Old Testament prophets has finally come for God to bring the Gentiles (τὰ ἔθνη) into his people (λαός) “for his name sake.” Thus, God’s people are no longer defined in terms of ethnicity, but in terms of faith in Jesus the Messiah.⁷⁹

Thus, for James, the turning of the Gentiles to God and their inclusion into the people (λαός) of God is grounded in the Old Testament prophets.⁸⁰ At this point he refers to Amos’ prophecy where God promised that “in those days” (ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ) he would rebuild the fallen tent of David and rebuild its ruins and restore it as it was “in the ancient days, that the remnant

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⁷⁴ My translation.
⁷⁸ Schabel, Acts, 638.
⁷⁹ Schabel, ibid., 638.
of men, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek me” (9:11–12 LXX).  

81 “The fallen tent of David” (ἡ σκηνὴ ∆αυιδ ἡ πεπτωκυῖα) in Amos refers presumably to the demise of the Davidic throne at the Exile in 586 BCE. Thus, “in those days” refers in Amos to the time after the Exile (cf. 9:1–10). The restoration of “the tent of David,” is “the coming kingdom of the Messiah, the scion of Jesse. At the time of his coming, according to the LXX text, both the righteous remnant and the elect among the Gentiles will seek him. Believing Gentiles who would have been ‘grafted in’ will share the riches of restored Israel.”  

In such a way, the two groups would comprise the “people of God.”  

In applying Amos’ prophecy, James argued that Scripture has foretold that “after these things” (µετὰ τῶν τῶν), that is after the Exile, God would return and restore ἡ σκηνὴ ∆αυιδ and subsequently bring the Gentiles called by the Lord’s name into the chosen people of God. In other words, according to James, the prophecy entailed both the renewal of the Davidic kingship and the conversion to the Lord of the remnant of mankind from all nations, namely the Gentiles.  

The reason for changing “in those days” into “after these things” (µετὰ τῶν τῶν) was due to the fact that, from James perspective, the exile lay in the past after which God would return and rebuild the fallen tent of David.  

Thus, by employing the phrase “after these things,” James meant that the time foretold by Amos had come for the Gentiles to be accepted into the people of God. James applied the prophecy of Amos messianically. For him, the prophecy with regard to the restoration of the Davidic house was fulfilled by the coming of Jesus Christ and his installation on the heavenly throne (Acts 2:29–36). David in his royal office is a type of Christ.  

When God sent the Messiah to Israel, he had designated Gentiles, on whom God’s name had been invoked (Amos 9:12), to be incorporated into the believing community of God, under the rule of the Son of David.  

Thus, what James wanted clearly to emphasize was that with the inclusion of the Gentiles, “God was choosing a people for himself, a new restored people of God, Jew and Gentile in Christ, the true Israel.”

81 Kaiser suggested that the text points back to the promise of 2 Sam 7:11–12, 16 (“The Davidic Promise,” 102).  
82 Braun, “James Use of Amos,” 121.  
One might conclude that “the Gentile mission did not originate as a bright idea of the early Church, nor did it occur unexpectedly or by accident; it was rooted in the words of Jesus, as a promise in his earthly ministry and as a command after the Resurrection.”

In this lay the reason why the early Christians began their preaching with the person, namely Christ. Their faith was focused on him, and in relation to him they used Scripture to support their teaching and actions.

Conclusions

Our task was to find how James interpreted and applied Amos’ prophecy in the context of the inclusion of the Gentiles into the Christian church. Two different views on the issue may be observed among the biblical scholars. The first one asserts that the Hebrew text cannot substantiate the interpretation that James, a Jew, used, because this would scarcely have been James’ way of using the Old Testament. Another view is that the Hebrew text, like the LXX, implies the inclusion of the Gentiles. This author holds that the latter view is correct. This author agrees with King who stated that James did not in any way violate the intended meaning of Amos’s prophecy, which means that the incorporation of the Gentiles into the church was present in the Hebrew text of Amos. Filson ingeniously observed that “even the Hebrew text, though it sounds more nationalistic than the Greek version, nevertheless promises the inclusion of Gentile nations in the restored Davidic kingdom, and so fits the point of the speech as Luke gives it.” And, as has been shown, the conjoined work of Archer and Chirichigno confirms that James’ citation really does not distort the original intent of Amos and is not based on a poor exegesis. It is especially interesting that James’ way of interpreting Amos 9:11–12 was similar to that by the Qumranians who had applied it to the rise of the Qumran community and restoration of the Torah to its rightful position.

In quoting the LXX, James was referring to a Scripture with which his

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89 See Filson, *Three Crucial Decades*, 79. He thought that it was natural for Luke to write up James’ speech in Greek, using the LXX.
91 Filson, *Three Crucial Decades*, 79.
92 See p. 18 of this paper. See also Archer and Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations*, 155.
93 See 4QFlor 1.12; CD 7:16 (Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 136, 380.
James' Use of Amos 9:11–12

audience, both Jews and Gentiles, were familiar, without violating the intended meaning of its prophecy. As Wilson properly observed, throughout Acts, the quotations from (2:17; 3:25; 13:47; 15:17) and allusions to (1:8; 2:39; 10:34; 15:14; 26:17; 28:26f) the Old Testament are “used to prophesy, explain and justify the proclamation to the Gentiles.” Thus, without violating the original meaning of the text, James' appeal to Amos' prophecy was to show that the conversion of the Gentiles was in agreement with what was happening as well as to support the decision about to be made (vv. 15–18).

A closer look into the text shows, as Kaiser stated, that James used a plain and straightforward hermeneutic rather than distorting or perverting the original message. Apparently, his quotation comes essentially from the LXX. Rather than being a straight quotation of Amos 9:11–12, it proves to be a conflation of several other texts including Jeremiah 12:15 LXX, Hosea 3:5 LXX, and possibly Isaiah 45:21. This would thus clarify the meaning of the expression “the words of the prophets (οἱ λόγοι τῶν προφητῶν)” in Acts 15:15. The conversion of the Gentiles was in agreement (συμφωνοῦσιν) with the words of the prophets. The reference to the “prophets” (plural) shows that James had more than just Amos 9 in mind.

Another question might be asked: could it be possible that James' speech was delivered in Aramaic? For one thing, it is very likely that James quoted the passage from Amos from memory. Then, it is quite possible that he translated the LXX text into Aramaic. Since Luke wrote in Greek and, endeavoring to incorporate James' speech in his book, he had to translate it into Greek; so he naturally used the LXX translation of the Amos' passage. However, whether James indeed quoted the LXX text or Luke translated it by using the LXX, does not deny the point James tried to make.

This single case of usage of Scripture by the New Testament authors can illustrate the role of the Old Testament in the life of the early church and how first Christians understood and interpreted Scripture. Ajith Fernando stated it in the following way:

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94 Wilson, The Gentiles, 243.
97 See Keener, Acts, 3:2247–2248; Bruce (Acts of the Apostles, 298) remarked that in the epistle of James all the Old Testament quotations are taken from the LXX; so Dupont, The Salvation of the Gentiles, 139.
Scripture and experience both played a role in arriving at the doctrinal formulation that emerged from the Jerusalem Council. God spoke through the experiences of Peter, Paul and Barnabas. But James showed that what they had experienced was in keeping with the Scriptures, so that it should become normative.\textsuperscript{100}

The early Christians saw logical relationships between Old Testament prophecy and its fulfillment in their days. Its fulfillment took place because God had foreseen and promised it by sending the Savior of the nations. With such an understanding they did not hesitate to bring out the implications emerging from a given passage. That is why they were able to preach the gospel message with full conviction and authority.

\textsuperscript{100} Fernando, 427.