

Robert Vannoy, Foundations of Biblical Prophecy, Lecture 22

Amos 9:11-15

Amos 9:11-15 Promise of Future Blessing

We'll look at Amos 9:11-15 which is about the fourth section of the book: "Promise of future blessing." Here Amos poses a note of hope against the background of the many preceding pronouncements of judgment. There has been much discussion about two questions pertaining to this final section of the book.

1. Authenticity

One, the question of its authenticity, that is, is this section to be attributed to Amos himself or is this something that was attached to the book at a later time? The line of argument that is used by those who question the authenticity say that the historical background implied is not that of Amos' time. The situation indicated in the concluding verses is that Judah has now been taken captive by the Babylonians.

Furthermore, it is difficult to believe that, at a time when David's dynasty was standing, men were bidden to look for the restoration of his "fallen hut," the closing up of "the breaches thereof," the raising up of "his ruins" and its rebuilding "as in the days of old" (v.11). In other words, in the Epilogue, the viewpoint is shifted; and the problem becomes similar to that of the authorship of Isaiah.

Remember when we discussed that issue with respect to Isaiah when he speaks about the return of Israel? So, the same line of argument is used here. In response, I just would say very briefly I think it can certainly be asked why a prophet might not presuppose the occurrence of what he had predicted? Amos says you're going to go into captivity beyond Damascus. He says your buildings are going to be destroyed. Your warriors won't escape. Why could not Amos, who prophesied the fall of Jerusalem in 2:4-5, presuppose this having happened and then look beyond it. In other words, it doesn't seem to me that that's a convincing line of argumentation, and therefore there shouldn't be any question about the authenticity of this last section of the book.

2. Questions on Interpreting Amos 9:11-15

But, I do not think that issue is as significant as the second issue. The second issue is the interpretive question of how you understand Amos 9:11-15. How are we to interpret verses 11 to 15 in chapter 9 including the use of verses 11 and 12 by James at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15? To me there is a two-pronged question here. How do we understand what he said here and its use by James at the Jerusalem Council? But also more internally to Amos 9:11-15: what is the relationship in interpretation in verses 11 and 12 of this passage to the interpretation of verses 13 and 15? In other words, is this passage a unit in which it's speaking basically about the same thing, or is there some kind of disjuncture between 11 and 12 and 13 and 15? How do you relate 11 and 12 to 13-15?

Amos 9:11-15 and Acts 15:12-19

J.A. Motyer says of Amos 9:11-15, "The world wide rule of the Davidic Messiah is a regular prophetic feature and figures prominently in the royal Psalms. The warlike metaphor in many of these passages is of course to be understood in terms of," notice his wording here, "the kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ and the missionary expansion of the church. This is the interpretation authorized by the N.T. in Acts 15:12-19." In other words, when James quotes Amos 9 in the discussions at the Jerusalem Council, he is interpreting Amos 9 as speaking of the kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ in rebuilding the fallen hut of David and the missionary expansion of the church. That is a rather common interpretation that turns up in many of your own papers.

O. T. Allis, in *Prophecy and the Church*, says of Amos 9, "Perhaps the best passage in the New Testament for testing the correctness of the dispensational method of interpreting Scripture." So Allis is an amillennialist and strongly opposed the dispensational interpretative method.

Notice in the Old Scofield notes in Acts 15, the statement made about the use of Amos 9 in Acts 15, "Dispensationally, this is the most important passage in the New

Testament.” So it’s interesting to me from the dispensational side of this debate as well as from the amillennialist side of the debate that the disagreement that has to do with this passage is very important.

The passage has been used in the manner of J.A. Motyer and O. T. Allis, and by many in the amillennial school of interpretation. The conclusions drawn from this passage as used here in the New Testament are then used to support similar interpretations of other Old Testament kingdom prophecies as references to the church. In other words, if, as he says in Amos 9 verse 12 that “they may possess the remnant of Edom,” and in Acts 15 that “possessing of the remnant of Edom” is modified to say, “that the remnant of men may seek the Lord” in verse 17. If that is an interpretation of the Amos statement then you have a figurative interpretation you might say, of that statement about Edom that is adopted by the Jerusalem Council.

Amillennial Viewpoint

Now, the line of argument that’s developed by those of this viewpoint is as follows. First, in verse 11 of Amos 9, the raising up of the tabernacle of David that is fallen is taken as a reference to the power of Christ as the Son of David in the present time of the preaching of the gospel. In other words, verse 11 says, “In that day I will restore David’s fallen tent, repair its ruins and build it up.” That is speaking of Christ and it is fulfilled in the present time of the preaching of the gospel. Theodore Laetsch comments, “He will raise up the fallen hut, and raise it to glory far surpassing that of its highest former splendor...this was fulfilled in the days of Messiah. Jesus and the Apostles began their work by calling to repentance the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Among these converts from the Jews there were undoubtedly a number of members of the ten tribes. In the Church of the New Testament the breach separating the Northern and the Southern Kingdom of Israel will be healed.” So its fulfillment is for the first advent and the establishment of the church in the early gospels.

O. T. Allis in *Prophecy and the Church* says, “The words ‘I will raise up the

tabernacle of David which is fallen' do not refer to a future Davidic kingdom," nor is there a connection with the raising up of the fallen clan of David in connection with Christ at the second advent. It is first advent and does not refer to a future Davidic kingdom. "The house of David, the mighty kingdom of David and Solomon, had sunk to the level of a lowly 'booth.' When Immanuel, Jesus, the Son of David, was born in Bethlehem, He was heralded and acclaimed by angels; and the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity as David's Son was the beginning of the raising up of the fallen booth of David. And when David's Son rose triumphant over death and commissioned His disciples with the words: 'All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth,' He claimed a sovereignty far greater than David ever knew, or ever dreamed of possessing.

So, when Peter and the other apostles declared that God had raised up Jesus and 'exalted him to his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior,' they were insisting that the mighty acts which they were enabled to perform were the direct exercise through them of his sovereign power." So, verse 11 was interpreted as speaking about the first advent of Christ, Jesus raising up the fallen house of David.

Verse 12 reads, "So that they may possess a remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name, declares the Lord." Possessing the remnant of Edom is made equivalent to the "conversion of the gentiles." This is based on the change of wording in the quotation of the Amos passage in Acts 15:17 where it reads, instead of the "possessing of Edom," "That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the nations upon whom my name is called." This significant change in wording is construed as a deliberate and inspired interpretation of the Amos passage by means of which the OT statement is raised to a higher level of meaning. You're moving from possessing the remnant of Edom to the residue of men seeking after the Lord. It is to be noted, however, that James quotes from the wording of the Septuagint.

We will move on to 13 to 15. Verses 13 to 15 read, "The days are coming, declares the Lord, when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the

hills. I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted, from the land I have given them, says the Lord.” From this interpretative prospective the first advent and the conversion of the Gentiles are in verse 12. Verses 13 to 15 are usually taken as descriptive of the Christian Church by means of figurative language.

Let me just read here from Laetsch page 192 where he says of verse 13, “The reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes.” He says, “the plowman preparing the soil for a new seeding shall overtake the reaper. Busily gathering in the harvest from the seed sown by the sower in the soil prepared by the plow. On the other hand, the treader of grapes will overtake man who is diligently sowing seeds for future crops. In other words, what’s this talking about? In the Church of Christ there will be incessant preparation and seeking out heresy, reaping and harvesting in the Church of Christ, work is prepared in sending out missionaries who are preaching the word, which will go on forever. And just as continuous will be the joyful gathering the sheaves by bringing the converts into the church.” And that’s done consistently with the Amos passage but verse 15 says, “I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted.” What is that talking about? That said, verse 15 is “Old Testament language for such New Testament prophecies as John 10:27, which says, ‘No one shall ever pluck them out of my hands,’ the security of the believer.” So verses 13 to 15 in this way of interpreting the passage are usually taken figuratively as descriptive of the church. Anthony Hoekema takes them as descriptive of the eternal state, rather than of the church but then one might ask why the emphasis on Israel? “I’ll plant Israel in their own land, I’ll bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities.”

I put in bold there on your handouts, see Anthony Hoekema *The Bible and the Future* for an example of how exactly to use a hermeneutic that can be applied to other passages as well. That’s the issue of the importance of this particular passage and its use in the New Testament because interpreters of this school of thought derive from it their

principles of interpretation. Here's what Hoekema says, "Prophecies of this sort may, however, also be fulfilled *figuratively*. The Bible gives a clear example of this type of fulfillment. I refer to the quotation of Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:14-18. At the Council of Jerusalem, as reported in Acts 15, first Peter and then Paul and Barnabas tell how God has brought many Gentiles to the faith through their ministries. James, who was apparently presiding over the council, now goes on to say, 'Brethren, listen to me. Simon [Peter] has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written, "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old"' (Acts 15:14-18). James is here quoting the words of Amos 9:11-12. His doing so indicates that, in his judgment, Amos's prediction about the raising up of the fallen booth or tabernacle of David ('In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen...') is being fulfilled right now, as Gentiles are being gathered into the community of God's people. Here, therefore we have a clear example in the Bible itself of a figurative, nonliteral interpretation of an Old Testament passage dealing with the restoration of Israel... Here, then, we find the New Testament itself interpreting an Old Testament prophecy about the restoration of Israel in a nonliteral way. And then notice his next comment. "It may well be that other such prophecies should also be figuratively interpreted. In other words, here is a biblical example of that kind of interpretation then why can't they use that interpretive method with other prophecies that refer to the future of Israel? At least we cannot insist that all prophecies about the restoration of Israel must be literally interpreted.

Interpreting Amos 9:11-15

1. Amos 9:12

Now, let's look at these interpretive questions a little bit further. What I want to do

is begin with point two, verse 12, in Amos 9. I've made point one verse 11, point two verse 12, point three verses 13-15. You can divide the Amos passage into verse 11, verse 12, and verses 13-15 and points one, two, and three. I want to look at point two first because I think point two, that is verse 12 of the Amos 9 passage, is the heart of the issue. So look at that first, and I think verse 12 is a point of particular importance because first, the New Testament quotation that comes from it, and secondly I think the conclusion that you draw concerning the interpretive issues in verse 12 of Amos has important bearings on how you will interpret verse 11 as well as verse 13-15. In other words, I think the heart of it is found in verse 12 and will determine what you do in verse 11 and verses 13-15.

Darash (seek) LXX & DSS or Yarash (Possess) MT

So looking at verse 12 first, there's a textual problem. Some of you came upon this. An article from 1953 in "Scientific Approach to the Old Testament," by Allan MacRae, refers to this Amos 9 passage. And what he notes is something that others have noted as well, is that the wording in Acts is a quotation of the Septuagint. In other words, when James quotes from Amos the language he uses agrees with the Septuagint. It doesn't agree with the Masoretic text in Amos 9. Allis agrees with this as well. MacRae notes further, however, that if there is any lifting of the OT prophecy to a higher level of meaning as amillennialist interpreters suggest, it is the Septuagint that initially did this, not James. Certainly the unknown writers of the Septuagint are not to be considered inspired.

So how are we going to explain the difference between the Septuagint and the Masoretic text? MacRae suggests the most logical answer is that the Septuagint and the Hebrew text were in agreement at the time of the Jerusalem Council, and that the same wording was found in both. If James had used a quotation that was different from what the men at the Council knew to be the Hebrew original, why did someone not say "wait a minute, an inaccurate quotation of the OT is not going to be the basis for deciding the issue of this council for us!" What makes this suggestion particularly feasible is that the

change of just one Hebrew letter, *yodh* to *daleth*, which is easily confused anyway, gives a Hebrew original agreeable to the Septuagint, plus the addition of two vowel letters which may have been introduced in the Hebrew text after the time of the translation of the Septuagint. In other words, the key word here is this *yarash* (possess) or is it a *darash* (seek), “That they might ‘seek’ me? The “seek” presupposes *darash* instead of *yarash* (possess), if that *yodh* was changed to a *daleth*. You see what is called a *vorlage* which was the Hebrew text that laid before the translators of the Septuagint. It could have been one that is consistent with the way the New Testament quotes Amos.

This suggestion, and this is something that MacRae was not aware of because this was not mentioned in the article, is strengthened by the observation of J. de Waard that one of the Dead Sea Scrolls 4QFlor 1.12, that’s not one of the biblical texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is a text that has an anthology of texts that center around the Davidic promise of 2 Samuel 7, and there is an allusion to Amos 9:11-12. The Hebrew wording exactly corresponds to the wording in the quotation in Acts. In other words, with the 4QFlor 1.12 within the Dead Sea Scrolls there is a Hebrew text that matches the Acts rendering of this verse rather than the Amos Masoretic text rendering. De Waard comments, “It would not be necessary to pose this question if a careful examination of Am 9,11 in 4QFlor I.12 and in Acts 15,16 did not compel us to do so. The text form of the Amos quotation in Acts differs from that of the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint, but it is exactly identical with that of 4QFlor.” The Septuagint is in verse 16, not verse 17, in Acts. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, we do have the *darash* (seek) instead of the *yarash* (possess). It seems that this suggestion carries additional weight since we do have evidence for that in the Dead Sea Scrolls now.

But secondly, what was the issue of discussion at the Council of Jerusalem and how does the Amos’ prophecy address this issue? In other words, how does James advance his argument and come to the conclusion that they came to the Council of Jerusalem on the basis of this quotation of the Amos passage? The issue under discussion at the Jerusalem Council needs to be clearly understood. The issue was not whether the

Gentiles could become Christians. That question had already been settled, go back to Acts 1:1-18, “The Holy Spirit came on them as on us.” The issue was whether those Gentiles who had been converted would also need to be circumcised. That is, would they first need to become Jewish proselytes to be accepted by the Church. Open to Acts 15:5-6, “Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.’” The apostles and elders met to consider this question. Do we have to circumcise these Gentiles in order to make them eligible to become members of the church. James quotes the Amos passage to settle that question. Who must be circumcised? His argument is as follows.

First, he summarizes Peter’s reference to the conversion of Cornelius and his household in verse 14. Turn to Acts 15 verse 13, “When they finished, James spoke up: ‘Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself.’” And you see, Peter got up, go back to verse 7. He got up and addressed them, “Brothers, you know that some time ago, God made a choice among you that the Gentiles hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is by the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.” That’s why James gets up and says, “Simon has described how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself.”

Amos 9:12 Quote in Acts 15 – Simple Citation not necessarily a Fulfillment Quote

Back to your handouts, point b. He then says that the words of Amos agree with this. Actually, he says the words of the prophets are in agreement with this and then he quotes from Amos. He does not say that the Amos passage predicted the specific matter

that Peter described, i.e., the conversion of Gentiles and the beginning of the church. We must remember that the point at issue at the Jerusalem council was not whether Gentiles could be converted; but, rather, would Gentiles be required to circumcise and to keep the law of Moses. It is not logical to hold that James quoted an OT prediction saying that Gentiles will come to Christ, and then from this concluded that since the OT says that Gentiles will come to the knowledge of Christ they do not need to be circumcised. Such a conclusion would beg the question that was being asked. The interpretation which maintains that James was quoting a verse to establish that Gentiles will be converted does not directly address the circumcision issue. Since the Council agreed to adopt James' advice, we must assume that the passage he quoted did address the question of circumcision in some way. The amillennial interpretation, normally, does not give adequate recognition to this point. The issue of certainty is not whether the Gentiles can be converted—yes, they can be converted—but when they do, do we need to circumcise them or not? If one assumes that the Amos passage is speaking about the eschatological kingdom, and about a fulfillment subsequent to the Jerusalem Council then, the use that James makes of the passage takes on a different meaning.

Amos 9:11 in Acts 15

Notice that James speaks on the appearance of Peter saying, “Simon has declared how God **at the first** showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself.” That’s a rather awkward statement. And you notice, as I put in bold here, ‘at the first.’ Why does he put that ‘at the first’? Then he summarizes what Peter had told them. When James connects the quotation from Amos with the conversion of the Gentiles he says (verse 16a) “**After this** I will return and...” James’ “**after this**” sequences with “**at the first**” of vs. 14 and is a clear modification of the Hebrew wording of Amos 9:11. In other words, as you read in Acts, James says, “God at first did this...after this I will return.” So in the Acts there’s that sequence, “at the first,” then “after this.” It is a clear modification of the Hebrew wording of Amos 9:11. In the Hebrew wording of Amos

9:11, it doesn't say "after this." Amos 9:11 begins, "In that day I will raise up." When James quotes "in that day I will raise up," he substitutes there "after this I will return and raise up the fallen tabernacle of David." The words "after this I will return" are not in the Hebrew book of Amos, nor are they in the Septuagint. There seems to be little doubt that James deliberately substituted the "after this I will return and raise up the fallen tabernacle of David" for the general time expression with which the Amos passage begins. James introduces this quotation by placing it in a more specific timeframe.

So, if God at first raised up Gentiles and after that will return, that's not first half it's the second half. In addition, as was noted before, James does not say that Amos had predicted that God will visit the Gentiles to take of them a people for his name, Acts 15:14b. Because he says, "To this the words of the prophets agree." James is not suggesting that Amos specifically predicted the events that Peter had described, but rather is suggesting that Amos, and this is the heart of it, envisions a time when such a people will already be in existence.

So according to James, what Amos says agrees with the fact recorded by Peter and Paul that God has begun to "visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name." If the entire passage is read with these considerations in mind, then it is not difficult to see the relation of the passage to the question of circumcision. To the members of the council, the argument seems to have been quite clear. Remember, the issue at the council was not whether Gentiles could become Christians, but whether they could become Christians and remain Gentiles. Thus the quotation from Amos must, in some way, give a clear and logical reason why the council should decide that it was not necessary for new Gentile converts to be circumcised. It does this, only if it is understood to be a description of the situation that will exist at the time Christ returns to set up his kingdom. If Amos is not speaking of this future time, when there will be Gentiles upon whom Christ's name is called, but is merely predicting that Gentiles will be saved, then the prophecy has no clear bearing on the issue of circumcision.

Conclusion:

Conclusion: Those who interpret the quotation from Amos as a description of the establishment of the church are one, attributing a “figurative interpretation of Amos” to James, when in fact he was simply quoting the correct Old Testament texts as evidenced by the Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts, which was subsequently corrupted. Two, they are taking the quotation in a way that has no bearing on the central question, whether the Gentile converts needed to be circumcised. And three, they are disregarding the language in which James introduces the quotation by omitting Amos’ phrase “in that day” and substituting “after this I will return” and in order to indicate a particular time that Amos’ prophecy will be fulfilled. In other words, it seems that that there’s sequencing where James says, “God at the first showed concern by taking of the Gentiles as a people for himself” summarizing Peter’s discussion of the conversion of the Gentiles. And then he says the word of God agrees with this. Then instead of “in that day,” he says “after this,” “after this I will return.” After the conversion of the Gentiles, I will return. And when I return, you see in verse 17, there will be Gentiles who will bear my name. There will be Gentiles in existence in that day upon whom the name of the Lord is called. If Gentiles are there at the time of Christ’s second advent upon whom the name of the Lord is called, obviously the Gentiles don’t need to be circumcised. It seems to me, that’s the line of argument.

Implication for Amos 9:11 and 9:13-15

Now let’s go back. If you take that view of verse 12, that can strongly change the interpretation of verse 11 as a reference to the eschatological kingdom of Christ in the second advent rather than to the Church at Christ’s first advent. And it seems that also then, with respect to verse 13-15, that would suggest that we should read 13-15 as descriptive of conditions that will exist at that time, not as a figurative description of the Church. Notice J. Barton Payne takes a mediating position. He views verse 11 as the

revival of the line of David in Christ's first coming. Then he sees the fulfillment of Amos 9:12 as the induction of Gentiles into Israel, that is the Church. He takes the phrase "after this and I will return" in Acts 15:16 as meaning after the exile and the preservation of Amos 9:9-10. Also, it is an equivalent for Amos' expression, "in that day" in the Amos context rather than the Acts context. Now to me that doesn't make a lot of sense. It seems to me that it's the Acts context we see James has modifying the wording. "At the first" and this "after I will return" is the Acts context, it's not the Amos context. But people argue it. But what's he do with 13-15? He says 13-15 are descriptive of the millennial prosperity. So Payne moves from the first advent of Christ to the merge of the Gentiles in connection with it to the end times millennial prosperity. Is that necessary? Is this passage a unity?

Amos 9:13-15

Aalders, who is amillennial, so normally you are expecting the conversion of the Gentiles as a figurative description of the Church in Acts 15:13-15, says, "My conclusion is therefore that we have two separate prophecies in Amos 9:11-15 which are concerned with two separate subjects and which find fulfillment in two entirely different periods. The first (verses 11-12) is a proclamation of the Messianic rule of the Davidic dynasty. This is fulfilled with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and its fulfillment continues in the conversion of the heathen by the preaching of the gospel. The second (verses 13-15) is a promise of return from exile, and is fulfilled in the return decreed by the Persian King Cyrus. In other words, it is fulfilled in the Old Testament period. Chronologically verses 13-15 would be earlier than 11 and 12. And he says "With this approach I oppose on the one hand the chiliasts who understand verses 13-15 as a reference to the return of the Jews to Palestine in the messianic time," I opposed that, "but on the other hand also various non-chiliastic expositors who spiritualize verses 13-15, and entirely against the clear sense of the words see here the spiritual benefits which Christ bestows on His church." In other words, he finds trouble accepting that hermeneutic that will be able to

find the Church in verses 13-15. There's a literal kind of language we've got there: the reaper, the plowman, bring back my exiled people Israel, plant Israel on their own land, never again to be uprooted. He says, "Neither the one nor the other idea is correct." In other words, the millennial or the spiritual. We can only do justice to the words as they now stand if we keep both prophecies (in agreement with what is often seen in prophecy) separate and understand the first as a reference to the Messiah, but the second as Israel's return from the Babylonian captivity. Can you see what he's wrestling with? He's wrestling with the legitimacy of taking verses 13-15 in a figurative way and applying it to the church. Does that do justice to the language in 13-15? He says, "No."

Well then what's his option? See, from his standpoint, there is no millennial period, so if you are going to read it in any kind of a literal way, it must be the return from the Babylonian exile. But this creates as many problems as it solves because, one, the flow of the passage is back to something prior to that. And second, the words, "I will plant them in the land never to be uprooted again," but they would be uprooted again subsequent to the return from exile. So, you see where he's struggling, but he doesn't come up with a good response.

Vannoy's Suggestion

I think the approach that I'm suggesting takes us to the second advent and not as some kind of reference to the conversion of the Gentiles in verse 12, but simply as the statement at that time as a reference to Christ's second return. "There will be Gentiles from whom my name is called" means we don't have to circumcise Gentiles, because when Christ returns we'll all be Gentiles upon whom the name of Christ is called. And if that's the case, why are we going to circumcise these people now? This is a complex passage, and there are a host of interpretative issues. What follows here I don't think is as critical, it is just some additional discussion of some different viewpoints.

Final edit by Katie Ells
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt