

[15:14](#)

“To take from the nations a people for himself” (*labein ex ethnōn laon tō onomati autou*) has some similarity to [Deut. 14:2](#), where God “chose you to be a special people from all the nations on the face of the earth” (*laon periousion apo pantōn tōn ethnōn* [cf. [Exod. 19:5](#); [23:22](#) LXX; [Deut. 7:6](#); [26:18–19](#)]), but whereas Deuteronomy refers to God selecting Israel to be his special people *separate from* the nations, James here appears to mean that God is now taking a group of people *out of the Gentile nations* to be a people for himself; James does not take up the question of the relationship between these believing Gentiles and the existing Jewish people. Maybe there is a deliberate use of the OT verse in a different sense from the original. The MT of [Deut. 14:2](#) has the same Hebrew word (*‘am*) that the LXX translates with two different words, so that Acts here reflects the LXX rendering. Moessner (1996: 241–42) traces the influence of [Jer. 12:15–17](#), but although there is some similarity in motif, there are no decisive linguistic parallels. The combination “a people for his name” is not found in the LXX, but it is used in the Palestinian Targum as a paraphrase for “a people for the Lord” (Dahl 1957–1958). Dahl notes the relevance of [Zech. 2:15](#) MT ([2:11](#) ET; [2:15](#) LXX), “Many Gentiles will take refuge in the Lord in that day and will become his people,” where the Targum has this phrase. See further Dupont (1985), who understands [18:10](#) similarly of a people that includes the Gentiles who have faith in God.

[15:15–18](#)

Although the quotation that follows [15:15](#) is essentially from Amos, James refers to “the words of the prophets.” The phrase might refer to the book of the twelve so-called Minor Prophets (cf. [7:42](#)), or James may have implied that other passages could have been cited also (cf., e.g., [Zech. 2:11](#); see Dahl 1957–1958); however, the reference may take account of the fact that the quotation includes allusions to other passages (Bauckham 1996: 165).

The citation from [Amos 9:11–12](#) is closer to the LXX than the MT, but with some differences in wording. It is difficult to compare the texts of Acts and the LXX because in both cases there are variants that make it difficult to be sure of the original wording.

[Amos 9:11–12 LXX](#)

[Acts 15:16–18](#)

¹¹*en tē hēmera ekeinē*

¹⁶*meta tauta anastrepsō*

cf. [Jer. 12:15](#)

anastēsō

kai anoikodomēsō

uses verb from omission below

tēn skēnēn Daudid

tēn skēnēn Daudid

tēn peptōkuian

tēn peptōkuian

kai anoikodomēsō

omission

ta peptōkota autēs

kai ta kateskammena autēs

kai ta katestrammena autēs

shift of verb: “destroy/overturn”

anastēsō

anoikodomēsō

repeats verb used above

kai anoikodomēsō autēn

kai anorthōsō autēn,

change of verb

kathōs hai hēmerai

omission

tou aiōnos

¹²*hopōs ekzētēsōsin*

¹⁷*hopōs an ekzētēsōsin*

adds *an*

hoi kataloipoi

hoi kataloipoi

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| | | |
|---------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| <i>tōn anthrōpōn</i> | <i>tōn anthrōpōn</i> | |
| | <i>ton kyrion</i> | addition |
| <i>kai panta ta ethnē,</i> | <i>kai panta ta ethnē</i> | |
| <i>eph' hous epikeklētai</i> | <i>eph' hous epikeklētai</i> | |
| <i>to onoma mou ep' autous,</i> | <i>to onoma mou ep' autous,</i> | |
| <i>legei kyrios</i> | <i>legei kyrios</i> | |
| <i>ho theos</i> | | omission |
| <i>ho poiōn tauta.</i> | <i>poiōn tauta</i> | omits <i>ho</i> |
| | ¹⁸ <i>gnōsta ap' aiōnos.</i> | cf. Isa. 45:21 ? |

Much more important are the differences between the MT and the LXX.

[Amos 9:11–12](#) MT

[Amos 9:11–12](#) LXX

¹¹“In that day

¹¹*en tē hēmera ekeinē*

I will raise up

anastēsō

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| | | |
|--|--|--|
| the booth of David | <i>tēn skēnēn David</i> | ("tent" or "tabernacle") |
| that is fallen | <i>tēn peptōkuian</i> | |
| and repair | <i>kai anoikodomēsō</i> | |
| their breaches, | <i>ta peptōkota autēs</i> | |
| and raise up his ruins, | <i>kai ta kateskammena autēs</i> | |
| | <i>anastēsō</i> | |
| and rebuild it | <i>kai anoikodomēsō autēn</i> | |
| as in the days of old, | <i>kathōs hai hēmerai tou aiōnos,</i> | |
| ¹² in order that they may possess | ¹² <i>hopōs ekzētēsōsin</i> | |
| the remnant of Edom | <i>hoi kataloipoi tōn anthrōpōn</i> | object becomes subject: "Edom/Adam" |
| and all the nations | <i>kai panta ta ethnē,</i> | |
| who are called | <i>eph' hous epikeklētai</i> | the LXX represents the Hebrew |

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by my name,” *to onoma mou ep’ autous,* relative construction
overliterally

says the LORD *legei kyrios*

ho theos

who does this. *ho poiōn tauta.*

The MT citation comes from the last chapter of Amos, where the tone is more hopeful than in the earlier parts of the prophecy. Judgment has come upon the people, but there will be restoration, specifically of “the booth of David”; this odd phrase can hardly refer to the temple (which was not built by David) but could refer to the “house of David,” the term “booth” signifying its weakness and temporariness until God sees fit to restore it “as in the days of old.” Possessing the remnant of Edom implies the conquest of neighboring lands instead of the Israelites themselves being invaded and overcome. What nations are called by God’s name? The answer seems to be the nations that are conquered by him (cf. [2 Sam. 12:28](#)). So the passage envisages that God will bring about a change in Judah’s fortunes expressed in the categories of the time.

In the LXX the first part of the prophecy is much the same. The claim that the text in Acts is closer to that in [4Q174](#) (de Waard 1965: 24–26; Wilcox 1965: 49; Hanson 1983: 17) is rightly rejected (Bruce 1990: 340; Barrett 1994–1998: 726; Stowasser 2001: 48–50). Nevertheless, some of the changes cause Ådna (2000: 136) to conclude that the citation is not dependent on the LXX.

In the second part, however, the LXX diverges from the MT. The object of “possess” in the MT has now become the subject, the new object is understood to be “me” (Bauckham 1996: 161–62), i.e., “the Lord” (supplied as *ton kyrion* in [Acts 15:17](#)), and the verb has changed from “possess” to “seek,” a difference of one consonant in Hebrew (*yāraš/dāraš*). The remnant “of Edom” has become “the remainder of men,” probably through reading the Hebrew consonants differently: *’ēdôm/’ādām*. We can thus understand the LXX text as arising from a different version of the Hebrew text of Amos, with similar words being substituted for the original text. This type of change is known in rabbinic sources as *’al tiqrē’*. Bauckham (1996: 160–61) and Ådna (2000: 131) follow earlier scholars in assuming that this is what is happening here, but Barrett (1994–1998: 728) is skeptical of the possibility (though he does not offer an alternative explanation).

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Which version is more likely to be original, the MT (which is followed by the Targum) or the Hebrew presupposed by the LXX? Evans (1993c: 222–23) notes that “Edom” was often understood as Rome in the Targumim, and therefore it is possible (though beyond proof) that an original “Adam” was reported by the Masoretes as “Edom” to reflect Jewish hopes at this time, and consequential changes were made to the rest of the text (“they may possess” replacing “they may seek”). Archer and Chirichigno (1983: 155), followed by Larkin (1995: 223n), propose that the MT is corrupt and should be amended, but there is no adequate reason for doing so (Jobes and Silva 2000: 194–95).

Some light may be shed on the situation by the fact that there are two allusions to the text in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where the prophecy is applied to the current situation of the sect. In [CD-A VII, 12–18](#) we read,

When the two houses of Israel separated, Ephraim detached itself from Judah, and all the renegades were delivered up to the sword; but those who remained steadfast escaped to the land of the north. As he said, “I will deport the Sikkut of your King and the Kiyyun of your images away from my tent to Damascus” [[Amos 5:26–27](#)]. The books of the law are the Sukkat of the King, as he said, “I will lift up the fallen Sukkat of David” [[Amos 9:11](#)]. The King is the assembly; and the plinths of the images and the Kiyyun of the images are the books of the prophets, whose words Israel despised. (García Martínez 1996: 37–38)

It may be only coincidence that [CD-A](#) cites the same two texts from Amos that we find cited in Acts ([7:43](#); [15:16–17](#)). [CD-A](#) takes “Sikkut” in [Amos 5](#) to refer to the Sukkat or tabernacles and then understands them as the book of the law. The “King” is understood as David in the light of [Amos 9:11](#), but then the King is identified as the assembly or community itself. Once the Sikkut is understood as the books of the law, the Kiyyun could easily be understood as the companion books of the prophets. Evans (1993b: 207) takes the passage to mean that “[Amos 9:11](#) was fulfilled when the Essenes restored the correct interpretation of the Law.”

The other citation is in [4Q174 1 I, 10–13](#). Here we have a set of OT texts with a broadly messianic reference:

And “YHWH declares to you that he will build you a house. I will raise up your seed after you and establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me” [[2 Sam. 7:12–14](#)]. This refers to the “branch of David,” who will arise with the interpreter of the law who will rise up in Zion in the last days, as it is written, “I will raise up the hut of David which has fallen” [[Amos 9:11](#)]. This refers to the “hut of David which has fallen,” who will arise to save Israel. (García Martínez 1996: 136)

Here the messianic reference is maintained with the arising of “David” understood as the Messiah. Later rabbinic interpretation preserved this understanding in giving the name “Bar Naphle” (“Son of the fallen [tabernacle]”) to the Messiah (*b. Sanh.* 96b–97a). (However, Qumran also has “the interpreter of the

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law,” who is unknown to the early church, playing a role.) The Targum of Amos also interprets the passage in terms of the powerful restoration of the Davidic dynasty and empire (Evans 1993b: 207–8).

In the present context in Acts it seems that God is to restore the fallen dynasty of David and all that appertains to it, with the aim that the remainder of humankind will seek the Lord—that is, the nations over which God’s name is called. The prophecy, however, has an addition at the beginning that appears to reflect [Jer. 12:15](#) LXX: “And it will be after I have cast them out *I shall return* [*epistrepsō*] and have mercy on them, and I shall make them dwell each in their inheritance and each in their own land.” “After these things” is a common enough phrase in prophecy (e.g., [Joel 2:28](#) [[3:1](#)] LXX); see commentary on [Acts 2:17](#) above); here it may refer simply to the judgments described earlier in Amos (cf. [Acts 7:42–43](#)).

At the end of the citation James adds “known from of old,” signifying that what God does is in accordance with his predetermined purpose; the words resemble [Isa. 45:21](#) LXX (*tis akousta epoiēsen tauta ap’ archēs*) and may be either a deliberate echo (Bauckham 1996: 164–65) or a coincidence (Barrett 1994–1998: 728). Dupont (1979: 145) notes that the rest of the passage is concerned with God’s activity as Savior, issuing his appeal to the ends of the earth, which fits in nicely with the theme of James’s speech.

The major discussion of the passage by Bauckham (1996: 156–70), closely followed by Ådna (2000: 126–42), makes the following points:

1. The avoidance of the use of *anastēsō* in Acts shows that the passage is not being interpreted of the resurrection of Jesus or of the restoration of the Davidic dynasty to the throne in the messianic rule of Jesus (Strauss 1995: 187–92), but rather of the restoration of a building: the temple of the messianic age (for *skēnē* in this sense, see [Tob. 13:11](#) LXX [[13:10](#)] ET). Bauckham argues that this could mean that God would build the eschatological temple through the agency of the Messiah. Here Bauckham differs from Barrett (1994–1998: 725–26), who suggests two possibilities: (a) the restoration of the kingdom is the appearing/resurrection of the Messiah, after which the way is open for Gentiles to enter the people of God; (b) the restoration of the kingdom is the conversion of Israel, only after which can the Gentiles enter. Barrett thinks that Luke would have held the former view, but the latter may have been held by some groups in the church. Stowasser (2001: 54) argues that the use of *anorthoō* reflects [2 Sam. 7:13](#); that is, the Amos prophecy is linked to the Nathan prophecy, just as in [4Q174 1 I, 10–12](#).

2. “I shall rebuild its fallen parts” is omitted because this could refer to the broken walls of a town rather than a temple; likewise, “as in the days of old” is omitted because the new temple will in fact be better than the old one.

3. The treatment of [Amos 9:12](#) would not be strange for an exegete familiar with both the MT and the LXX versions. It is not possible to decide whether the differences between the texts are the result of accidental misreading or of deliberate interpretation, but Jewish exegetes of the time would “have

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welcomed the exegetical potential of the LXX text ... as a legitimate way of reading the Hebrew text” (Bauckham 1996: 161).

4. The insertion of the object *ton kyrion* (“the Lord”) rather than the expected *me* (“me”) reflects influence from [Zech. 8:22](#) LXX, which prophesies that “many peoples and many nations shall come to seek the face of the Lord Almighty in [the temple] in Jerusalem.”

5. The opening “after these things” (*meta tauta*), instead of the LXX’s “in that day” (*en tē hēmera ekeinē*), suggests that the fulfillment of this prophecy takes place after something else has happened: the turning away of God from judging Israel. Bauckham proposes that the phrase comes from [Hos. 3:5](#), where the Israelites will “return” (*epistrephō* [used in [Acts 15:19](#) of the Gentiles turning to God!]) and seek the Lord and David their king.

6. The “return” (*anastrepsō*) of the Lord reflects [Jer. 12:15](#), which speaks of Yahweh’s return to his people after judging them and goes on to refer to the Gentiles being built in the midst of God’s people. A reference to [Zech. 8:3](#) is possible but less likely. Hanson (1983: 85) notes that the LXX always uses *epistrephō* in this sense and concludes that a different Greek version is being used here.

7. The end of the citation includes words from [Isa. 45:21](#), from yet another passage that refers to the nations drawing near to God and being saved.

8. All this makes it clear that the restored temple is in fact the Christian community. The hope of the Gentiles coming into the restored temple is widely attested in prophecy. But did this mean that they had to become Jews?

9. Finally, the phrase “all the nations over whom my name has been called” expresses God’s ownership of the peoples; it is used frequently of Israel as God’s special people (contrast [Isa. 63:19](#), where the Gentiles are “those over whom your name has *not* been called”), and its use here indicates, remarkably, how the Gentiles are now understood as God’s people, without any mention of the need for them to become Jews: “the nations *qua* Gentile nations belong to YHWH” (Bauckham 1996: 169). But this phrase is also used in [James 2:7](#), probably with reference to Christian baptism; if so, Christian baptism suffices to recognize Gentiles as the people of God.

Opinions differ regarding the provenance of this citation. Barrett (1994–1998: 727–28) is typical of many scholars who hold that it was composed on the basis of the LXX by a Greek-speaking Christian and therefore cannot go back to James. Bauckham (1996: 182–84 [whose arguments evidently were unavailable to Barrett]) strongly disagrees and, in my opinion, has the better of the argument. Ådna (2000: 142–43) argues for the possibility that the citation is a Greek rendering of a Hebrew original independent of the LXX but, in my view, does not demonstrate this point sufficiently. The use of a collection of *testimonia* that included both this and the earlier citation of Amos in [Acts 7](#) is defended by Stowasser (2001) on the grounds that both texts are cited in the Qumran texts and that there may be some signs of redaction of the quotation here at a pre-Lukan stage; the texts could well have been

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linked together by the catchword “tent” to describe judgment followed by restoration; the argument is delicate and, though falling short of proof, feasible.

The use of the citation establishes that “the Gentiles do not have to become Jews in order to join the eschatological people of God and to have access to God in the Temple of the messianic age” (Bauckham 1996: 178).

[15:19–20](#)

That, however, is not the end of the matter. The Gentiles are required to abstain from foods sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, things strangled, and blood. Behind this list many scholars detect the influence of [Lev. 17–18](#), which contains various regulations that are binding also on aliens “living among you” in Israel (Pesch 1986: 2:81; Jervell 1998: 397–98). In Leviticus only sacrifices offered at the tent of meeting are acceptable, with the implication that only the meat of these may be consumed; hence the text can be taken as indirectly forbidding the consumption of sacrificial meat offered to idols ([Lev. 17:8–9](#)). The consumption of blood is expressly forbidden ([Lev. 17:10–12](#)). The blood must be drained from any animal that is eaten; hence it can be argued that implicitly the eating of animals killed by strangulation (without draining off the blood) is forbidden ([Lev. 17:13–14](#)). Sexual immorality of all kinds is said to be forbidden in [Lev. 18:26](#) (but the reference is to the preceding list of forbidden relationships, and prostitution is not mentioned). These four items occur in the same order in [Acts 15:29](#) (though not in [15:20](#)). In Leviticus these regulations are bound up with the fact that such actions pollute the land. The statement in Acts does not reflect specifically LXX phraseology at this point. The word *alisgēma* (“pollution”) occurs in the Greek Bible only here in [Acts 15:20](#) (although the cognate verb *alisgeō* occurs in [Dan. 1:8](#); [Mal. 1:7](#), [12](#); [Sir. 40:29](#)). The word *porneia* (“sexual immorality”) is not used in Leviticus, but many examples of it are given. Bauckham (1996: 174–78) argues that the choice of these restrictions (excluding the Sabbath requirement on resident aliens in [Exod. 20:10](#); [Deut. 5:14](#)) reflects the prophecies about the Gentiles joining the people of God and living “in the midst of them,” specifically [Jer. 12:16](#); [Zech. 2:11](#). Only the pentateuchal rules for aliens “in the midst” are applied here to Gentiles in the new people of God. The *gezerah shavah* link (use of a common word creating a link) between the passages depends on the MT and not on the LXX. So Gentiles do not have to become Jews (i.e., proselytes) when they come into the new people of God, but they are required to keep the commandments that applied to Gentiles living in Israel. Thus certain aspects of the OT law were applied to Gentiles. Nevertheless, the prohibition of nonkosher food has been quietly dropped from most Christian practice. On this, see the comment by Calvin (Calvin 1965–1966: 2:51–52, cited in Barrett 1994–1998: 738).

This interpretation is not universally accepted. The proposal to find the origin of the requirements elsewhere, specifically in the “Noachian precepts” that developed in Judaism as God’s law for all peoples (cf. [Gen. 9:4–6](#); [Jub. 7:20](#); see Str-B 3:37–38), is less convincing, but the broad similarities are not surprising. Barrett (1994–1998: 734–35) notes that Jews under persecution faced three issues on which compromise was impossible—idolatry, the shedding of blood, and incest—and thinks that these are the

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basis of the requirements here, but the parallel is much less close, and the rationale for the adoption of these points here is not clear. Turner (1982: 114–19) and Witherington (1998: [464–65](#)) are skeptical of the appeal to [Lev. 17–18](#). Turner argues that Luke did not expect believing Gentiles to keep the law and that Jewish law required more from the Gentiles than simply the four requirements listed; these are ad hoc requirements, the minimum needed to enable fellowship with scrupulous believing Jews. Witherington draws attention to the points where the requirements do not correspond very precisely with those in Leviticus and develops an alternative understanding of the passage as prohibiting the eating of sacrificial food in pagan temples. It can be seen that these regulations would in fact deal on a practical level with the problem of fellowship at the table in mixed churches (similarly, Blomberg 1984: 65–66).

[15:21](#)

The final comment by James refers to the way in which “from ancient times [the law of] Moses, being read, has people who proclaim it in every town in the synagogues each Sabbath.” This refers to the continuing knowledge of the law among Jewish Christians and may confirm that the regulations are in fact drawn from Leviticus. Alternatively, it may be a way of saying, somewhat ironically perhaps, that if Gentiles want to find out more about the law of Moses, they know where to go (see Barrett 1994–1998: 737–38).