

"TO THIS AGREE THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS"

A Critical Monograph on Acts 15:14-17
Abridged by the Author

CHARLES ZIMMERMAN
Winona Lake, Indiana

"Simeon hath declared how God at first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name, And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things." (Acts 15:14-17)

The significance of this passage lies in the use of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messianic kingdom by the Apostles of the early Church. Its dispensational implications have been under debate for some time and from many quarters. This can be made clear by citing two contrasting statements. Scofield writes, "Dispensationally, this is the most important passage in the New Testament."¹ On the other hand, Bruce argues that the passage "has been given an exaggerated 'dispensational' significance far beyond the implications of the text."² Without doubt there is an interpretation which would be most harmonious with the total context of Holy Scripture and would be acceptable to a serious student of the Word.

At the outset it should be recalled that Christianity was an outgrowth or development of the true, genuine Hebrew religion. Christ himself was a Hebrew after the flesh. His ministry was exercised among Hebrews. Following Pentecost the Church growth had been almost exclusively Hebrew. There may have been exceptions as scattered disciples preached Christ here and there and Gentiles heard and believed. However, the general movement was Hebrew. Therefore, the Church experienced a violent perturbation upon the admission of Cornelius, a Gentile, as recorded in Acts 10. This was only the beginning of a threatening, long-continued controversy. The problem was doomed to come to a head in the not-too-distant future.

The crisis occurred upon the return of Paul and Barnabas to Antioch from their first missionary journey. They found that certain men had come down from Judea and were insisting that circumcision and submission to the Mosaic law were necessary for salvation.

The danger of this course was clear. The fundamental principle of the Gospel, salvation by grace through faith, was at stake. The practical question of fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians also lay in the balance.

Paul and Barnabas were appointed to go up to Jerusalem and discuss the problem with the apostles and elders. The church assembled and the discussion followed. There were three notable addresses upon that occasion.

Peter was the first to speak. Without arguing doctrine, he just stated the facts and the deduction. He reminded the company that ten years before he had been led by God to the house of Cornelius. The members of that household, though being Gentiles, heard the Gospel and believed. The deduction was then made clear. If God accepted these Gentiles and cleansed their hearts by the Holy Spirit, why should further conditions now be imposed on them which God Himself plainly did not require.

During the silence which followed, Barnabas and Paul presented more supporting evidence for Peter's argument. Their recent missionary journey through Cyprus and Asia Minor revealed the mind of God in the bestowal of blessings upon the Gentiles.

At this point, all eyes were turned upon James, the brother of our Lord. As a leader among the elders of the Jerusalem church, he enjoyed the respect and confidence of all. He referred to Peter's speech. Summarizing it, he said, "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name." This fact is said to be in perfect harmony with the words of the prophets.

Now it is generally accepted that the prophecy to which Peter was referring is found in Amos 9:11,12. According to the best authorities the prophecy was given approximately eight centuries before its use in Acts 15.³ Among the prophecies of Amos, it comes at the conclusion of an elaborate pronouncement of woes and judgments upon the Northern Kingdom of Israel and, generally, upon the whole "house of Jacob." As the tone of the prophecy changes, the prophet reveals that the fallen fortunes of the royal house of David will be restored and it will rule over all the territory which had been included in David's empire. Here is a clear reference to the Messianic reign.

This exposes the real crux of the problem. How could James quote an Old Testament prophecy concerning the future Messianic Kingdom as support for certain happenings in the church? In what sense do these "words of the prophet" agree with the "taking out" of the Gentiles?

FULFILMENT IN THE CHURCH?

Those who hold this view believe that the words of the prophet found their complete Messianic fulfilment in the reception of the Gentiles into the Church and Christianity. This was done for the first time at the house of Cornelius in Caesarea by the virtue of what had happened on the day of Pentecost. God took a people from the Gentile world. This is understood to be the mystery, "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel" (Eph. 3:6).⁴

This view finds its basis in an eschatological framework which assumes that the Old Testament prophecies about the coming kingdom are fulfilled in the Church. This framework may consist of either the total spiritualizing method of the amillennialists or the semi-spiritualizing method of the post-millennialists. Therefore, all support for this view will be conditioned by this method of interpretation.

At the very outset in James' use of the prophecy, a variation from the Hebrew text occurs. It is felt that "after these things" in the Greek New Testament and "in that day" in the Hebrew text are used synonymously and interpretatively. Lenski argues,

Amos writes, "in that day" i.e., when Israel's punishment will have been inflicted, in the day when the Messianic Kingdom will be founded, in the day of the Christian Church. When James spoke, that day had come and hence he quotes interpretively when he substitutes the phrase, "after these things," namely the inflictions of which Amos had spoken.⁵

The verb, "I will return," was inserted by James and does not appear in the Hebrew text. Barnes explains what he feels is meant by it when he says,

When the people of God are subjected to calamities and trials, it is often represented as if God had departed from them. His returning is an image of their restoration to his favor and to prosperity.⁶

It is felt that the building again of David's tabernacle does not refer to the house of David or David's descendants, even as a royal line. "But in Jesus, risen and glorified, the throne and the Kingdom or rule of David were raised up and established forever."⁷ The tabernacle stood for the Church. The Church of Israel had fallen into a desperate state, because its parts were ruined. James was saying that God would restore it.

It is further supposed that James was most concerned with the words "all the Gentiles." The great Messianic restoration was intended most particularly for the Gentiles.⁸ Their coming into it made David's tabernacle (the Church) greater than ever.

The pronounced spiritualizing method used by the adherents of this view is noted for its absence of "controls" in interpretation. That is, there are no consistent literal and grammatical bounds within which they must operate. Its attraction lies in its flexibility. However, if words do not mean what they say within the bounds of common sense interpretation, then the reader has nothing to guide him in his understanding. He is in imminent peril of going astray theologically at any point. Typical dangers will be pointed out in refuting this view.

First, the proponents assume that which must be proved when asserting that "in that day" of the Hebrew text is synonymous with the day of the Christian church. This conclusion is based only upon the assumption that the Church is the recipient of all Messianic Kingdom blessings.

Second, the words of the Lord, "I will return," are made to be only an image which refers to restoration of favor. However, the language plainly implies a personal appearance! The prophet's emphasis on restoration is not neglected by James. This may be noted in the verbs that he used, "I will build again" and "I will set it up." It didn't just happen that James adds this idea to the prophecy given by Amos. Could it be possible that this phrase "I will return" was inserted as an accommodation to the particular situation at hand as the result of a New

Testament enlightened understanding to indicate that the restoration would come to pass upon the Lord's literal return to reign?

Third, confusion arises in identifying the "tabernacle of David" with the Church. To follow through with such a hazardous method of interpretation would make the words of our Lord meaningless when He said, "I will build my Church" (Matt. 16:18). There is no indication that this had been in process during the past centuries through Israel. The church was a new concept. Walvoord comments on this matter relative to the passage at hand. He says,

By no possible stretch of the plain meaning of the passage can the tabernacle of David be made to be an equivalent of the New Testament Church. The prophecy concerns the rebuilding of that which was fallen down. The "ruins" are to be rebuilt "as in the day of old." The nature of the blessings are earthly, territorial, and national, and have nothing to do with a spiritual church to which none of these blessings has been promised.⁹

Fourth, only through manipulation of the Scripture can it be said that the great Messianic restoration was intended most particularly for the Gentiles. The very opposite is true. Israel is to be the main recipient of Messianic restoration. "He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isa. 11:12). "He that scattered Israel will regather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock" Jer. 31:10). The regathering as well as the scattering is applied to Israel.

It should be said that by far the majority of expositors consulted by the writer adhere to this view. However, in all fairness to many early expositors (before the twentieth century) whose writings seem to classify them with this view, the writer wishes to absolve them from any theological stigma. They were writing before many of the fine lines of eschatological distinctions had been drawn. Therefore, many of their statements are broad and general because no issue had demanded a neat definition. What they did not say should never be made to reflect upon their basic theological position.

FULFILMENT IN PRINCIPLE?

The exponents of this view suggest that the words of the prophet were fulfilled in principle at the time of the conversion of Gentiles. Perfect fulfilment will occur in the future Messianic Kingdom.

The writer is not unaware of the limitations of language in naming this view. To say that an application of a principle in a given prophecy is a fulfilment of that prophecy is to speak somewhat meaninglessly. However, warrant for such usage is given by Terry in stating,

When a given passage is of such a character as to be susceptible of application to other circumstances or subjects than those to which it first applied, such secondary application should not be denied the name of a fulfilment.¹⁰

It is suggested that James refers to the facts related by Peter. He shows how those facts were in perfect harmony or agreement (not literal fulfilment) with the words of the prophet. The blessings of Gentiles as Gentiles had been announced by God long before. Amos is quoted as proof that there would be Gentiles upon whom God's name would be called. Therefore, there should be nothing inconsistent with Gentile conversion.

James is not understood to say that the perfect fulfilment of this was now taking place, or that the tabernacle of David was now being raised up. One of the proponents of this view says,

It is sufficient for him that such a thing as Gentiles being owned as God's was in full accord with God's ways announced. The prophecy clearly looks on to millennial times, and not to Christian; but that which God can do at one time cannot be in itself inconsistent for Him to do at another.¹¹

This view clearly recognizes a literal, future Messianic reign of Christ on earth. It also ably handles the word "agrees." This is an extremely unusual word for an introductory formula of a prophetic quotation. In this case it is merely suggesting an agreement of a principle; namely, the inclusion of Gentiles as God's people.

However, one question must be answered if this view is to be accepted. Why did James change the words of the prophet, "in that day," to "after these things?" If there was no immediate contextual time element involved and if the fulfilment of the prophecy was yet future, why change the words given by the prophet. It was not necessary for the prophet to say, "after these things" to indicate that the blessings were to follow the judgments. This is clear even upon a cursory reading of the passage. The time element was merely stated as "in that day." Since "that day" was still future for James, it would seem unlikely that he would change the phrase unless he had some further content of revelation to unfold.

It may also be asked how the argument of this view bears upon the basic problem at the Jerusalem council. The problem did not revolve around the matter of Gentile inclusion as a principle. This was foretold over and over in the Old Testament (Isaiah 2:2; 11:10; 60:5; 66:23). It was a matter of common knowledge. The heart of the question involved the imposition of certain Jewish requirements upon Gentiles as necessary for salvation in the existing Christian economy. For lack of development and explanation, the strength of this view is weakened.

MULTIPLE FULFILMENT?

The proponents of this view hold that the words of the prophets began to be fulfilled at the time when God called out for Himself a people from among the Gentiles and will be completed in fulfilment in the future Messianic Kingdom. This view is based upon a hermeneutical principle suggested by Ramm that "there is in prophecy primary and ultimate reference, i.e., the possibility of successive fulfilment."¹² Terry as well makes room for such a possibility. A prophecy may not be the prediction of a specific event, "but a general oracle of God, and of such a nature as to be capable of repeated fulfilments."¹³ Kent understands certain prophetic fulfilments recorded by Matthew in his gospel to be of this nature.¹⁴

It is the contention of this view, "that God had at this time begun to choose for himself a new people who were to bear His name, a people from among the Gentiles."¹⁵ However, this was only the beginning. In the same sense, the subsequent conversion of every Gentile who believes, provides the occasion of further or multiple fulfilments. Completion of the fulfilment will occur in the Messianic Kingdom upon the restoration of the Jews and the inclusion of all the Gentiles upon whom the name of God is called.

Bruce holds to some variation of this view. He agrees concerning the complete fulfilment of the prophecy. He writes, "the primary sense of the Massoretic Text is that the fallen fortunes of the royal house of David will be restored and it will rule over all the territory which had been included in David's empire."¹⁶ His deviation comes in explaining how James uses the prophecy.

James' application of the prophecy finds the fulfilment of its first part (rebuilding of the tabernacle of David) in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, the Son of David, ...and the fulfilment of the second part in the presence of believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews in the Church.¹⁷

If it is assumed that "agreement of the words of the prophets" means the same as "fulfilment of the words of the prophets," which may be a dangerous position, then the writer understands how Bruce is crowded into his explanation. The proponents say that multiple fulfilments of the last part of the prophecy occur as believing Gentiles are called God's people. But James did not quote the last part only. He also spoke concerning the tabernacle of David. How was this being fulfilled? Bruce suggests it was being fulfilled in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ. This conclusion involves a spiritualizing method akin to that used by the first view considered.

Therefore, the writer has some problems with Bruce's explanation. By what method of hermeneutical manipulation can the "tabernacle of David" refer to David's empire and rule (i.e. the Son of David) and, almost in the same breath, refer to the resurrection and exaltation of Christ? Also, it seems strange that the apostles or Christ himself never referred to this text when they appealed to the Old Testament for attestation of the resurrection of Jesus. Rather, they appealed over and over again to the Psalms (comp. Psa. 16:10 with Acts 2:25-31, Psa. 2:7 with Acts 13:33-37, Psa. 118:19-26 with Matt. 21:9, 42). Could it be that the apostles saw nothing of Christ's resurrection in the prophecy of Amos concerning the building again of the tabernacle of David?

If the holders of this view suggest that the first part of the prophecy quoted from Amos was not relevant to that time, but rather to a later time (which some seem to imply by their silence), then it may be asked, Why did James include it in the quotation? Why did he not also include some of the judgments which precede this passage in Amos? The judgments seem to have reference to the same group of people as the blessing.

How does the prophecy concerning "all the Gentiles" agree with what Peter had just said? Peter's words were not nearly so inclusive. He only said that God visited the Gentiles to take "out of them" (not "all of them") a people for His name. The writer does not wish to appear pedantic, but when it is said in Scripture that a certain thing is being fulfilled, who has the

authority to suggest that part of it is and part of it isn't being fulfilled? This is the position and dilemma into which one is forced if this view is accepted.

The writer is ready to concede that part of the prophecy is of such a nature as to lend itself to multiple fulfillments. The inclusion of Gentiles may be the common element in fulfillments which occur at different times. However, James does not just quote that part which pertains to Gentiles. There is also the subject of the "tabernacle of David." Though a prophecy may be capable of successive fulfillments, it does not seem likely that when a fulfillment is stated as such it is intended to be accomplished in stages.

FULFILMENT IN SEQUENCE

Those who hold this view believe that the words of the prophets are not yet fulfilled but will be fulfilled in the future Messianic Kingdom. They are used here to unfold the sequence of the future program of God for men.

There is to be a taking out of Gentiles into the church according to the present economy. "After these things" the Lord will return and build again the Davidic dynasty. The prophecy will be fulfilled in a proper time sequence; namely, in the future Messianic kingdom. Chafer suggests that, "the elders of the early Church distinguished here between the Church as a present Divine objective and the final return to, and completion of, the Davidic covenant."¹⁸ The harmony and agreement of the words of the prophet with Peter's statements consisted in this, "that there was no conflict when all Scripture was properly referred."¹⁹ When the sequence of events in God's program for the ages was recognized, there would be no problem of establishing right policies for the Gentiles at that time or in the future.

The writer has accepted this view as being the most nearly correct interpretation. It seems to present the fewest problems and follows the most consistent literal, historical and grammatical system of interpretation. The strength of this view will be better understood by means of the following development.

First of all, it must be established that this passage has the Church in view as distinct from the Messianic kingdom. Historically it may be observed that the emphasis upon the Kingdom in the early chapters of Acts helps to explain the Jewish-Gentile problem in the Apostolic church. Running parallel with the movement of the Kingdom in Acts there was also the history of the Church which began at Pentecost. McClain points out that,

Because of the reoffer of the Kingdom to Israel, the period begins with the Kingdom in the forefront. And while the prophets had made clear that the Gentile nations were to share in its benefits, the nation of Israel always held the place of priority. Therefore, it becomes understandable that the admission of Gentiles to the ekklesia raised the problem of how they were to be received, if at all.²⁰

The adjustment of the church was being accomplished by the growth of Jewish opposition to the offer of the Messianic kingdom and by the process of new revelation concerning the unique nature of the Church begun on the day of Pentecost. The words of James at the Jerusalem Council were a part of the latter process. Chafer says, "The early (Jewish) Church is

discovering the new divine purpose and recognizing that postponement of the earthly Kingdom."21

It seems that as late as the third chapter of Acts there was a genuine offer of the Kingdom to a repentant Israel. However, upon their rejection of the Kingdom and intensified opposition against those who believed and announced that Christ was the Messiah of Israel, there was a shift in preaching emphasis from the Kingdom as an imminent possibility contingent on Israel's repentance, to the Church as a unique body of believers in which all racial and national distinctions disappear.

By the time of the passage under study, this shift was perhaps most pronounced in the message of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, who had just returned from a prosperous missionary journey. No doubt the emphasis in his oral ministry was similar to that of his written epistles. It was made perfectly clear. Christ "hath made both (Jew and Gentile) one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition...for to make in Himself of twain one new man" (Eph. 2:14, 15). This change in emphasis indicates a transition in the Divine economy relative to Israel. The Church as a unique body was being unveiled having a glory all its own.

The reaction of the Jewish leaders to the message that Jesus Christ is the true Messiah of Israel is certainly not in harmony with the Old Testament revelation concerning the Messianic Kingdom and its establishment. Rather than opposition to the Messiah, there is every indication that Israel will be characterized by repentance in that day. "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son" (Zech. 12:10). This period recorded in the Acts of the Apostles must be, without question, distinct from the Messianic Kingdom.

Peter's address at the Jerusalem Council also indicates a distinction. Peter, in relating how the Gentiles believed and received the Holy Spirit, stated that God, "put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). This is the church economy as indicated in Eph. 2. Paul made it even more plain when he said, "For there is no difference between the Jew and Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him" (Rom. 10:12).

However, the Scriptures make it quite plain that in this Messianic Kingdom there will be some distinction between Jews and Gentiles. The prophet Isaiah sees Israel as the economic, social and religious leader among nations in the Messianic Kingdom. Nations will be owned of the Lord as "nations that are called by my name" (Amos 9:12), but Israel "shall be named the Priest of the Lord: men shall call you the Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves" (Is. 61:6). It would seem that the Gentiles will be the literal servants of Israel in that day. "And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers" (Is. 61:5). At that time there will be a difference between Jew and Gentile; therefore, Peter must have had reference to something other than the Messianic Kingdom.

The doctrines relative to the Church and the Messianic Kingdom are clearly established in this passage. Amos introduces his prophecy with the time element, "in that day." This phrase has undoubted reference to the "day of the Lord." In Amos 5:18, 20, it is specifically

called the "day of the Lord." It is common to almost all the Old Testament prophets.

McClain describes this as "a period which is always associated with the Kingdom of Old Testament prophecy."²³ It seems to be a period of intense judgment followed by immense blessing for Israel. The latter will be initiated upon the return of the King. At this time, God will raise up the "tabernacle of David." There is little question but that this refers to the "Davidic throne." However, it should be understood that the New Testament nowhere equates the throne of the Father with the throne of David. Christ is seated "on the right hand of the Majesty on high," (Heb. 1:3) but this is not at all the same as being seated on the throne of David.

The establishment of David's throne will secure Israel's supremacy over the nations, will be a time of material prosperity, and will guarantee their permanence in the land. Israel is the center of all events.

This could never be identified with the New Testament Church. It concerns a rebuilding of that which had fallen down. The ruins will be set up again "as in the days of old" (Amos 9:11). As Walvoord says, "The nature of the blessings are earthly, territorial, and national, and have nothing to do with the spiritual Church to which none of these blessings have been promised,"²⁴.

It is worthy of note that this distinction needed to be taught to the disciples as late as Acts 15. Throughout the ministry of Christ they were encouraged to expect a literal fulfillment of the Kingdom promises. They had been promised thrones upon which they would judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). Sufferings in this life were to be rewarded by eating at the King's table (Luke 22:30). In Acts 1:6 they were still looking for a literal Kingdom. While Christ did not reveal the exact "time" for its establishment, neither did He spiritualize it and transfer all their hopes to the Church.

Though the Kingdom was postponed, the promises continued undimmed. Christ would yet return and reign upon the earth. Therefore, a spiritualizing of the Old Testament prophecy, either completely or partially, does violence to the text and to the particular doctrines which are involved.

Therefore, this view most nearly agrees with the total Biblical revelation concerning the Church and Messianic Kingdom. Amos and Peter were talking about two different things.

Secondly, the context of the passage provides a clue as to the relevancy of the prophecy quoted by James to the immediate problem in the Church. There has been considerable confusion on this point. Gerstner suggests the difficulty by saying,

Peter and James also testified that God was actually saving the Gentiles without circumcision and had predicted that in the last days He would restore the residue of men (vv. 15-17). It is difficult to see what bearing that verse had on the precise point of the controversy, which was not whether Gentiles would be saved, but whether they would be saved without the Jewish rites.²⁵

Those who hold to the "fulfilment in principle" view readily solve the difficulty by indicating that the prophecy is quoted to convince them that the principle of Gentile conversion was in keeping with the facts which Peter declared. But the men of old knew very well that the Gentiles should be saved, and the prophets clearly predicted the fact. Therefore, this was not the crux of the problem.

If it be suggested that the Church as a unique entity is under consideration with the principle of Gentiles being included on the same basis as Jews, it should be stated that the prophets did not know of the birth of the Church in which Gentiles were "fellowheirs and of the same body" (Eph. 3:6). This conception was first given to Paul by revelation and now was "made manifest...by the Scriptures of the (New Testament) prophets" (Rom. 16:26). Since the Old Testament did not contemplate this new body, how could quotations from that source be found to bear on it?

Others have more rightly pointed out that the real problem which demanded a church council was whether Gentiles could be saved without performing certain Jewish rites. This seems to be most plausible.

However, some have come to some strained conclusions. Maclaren feels that the argument of silence is the force of James' quotation of the prophecy. He writes,

Now the force of this quotation lies, as it seems, ...in the argumentum a silentio, since the prophet says nothing about ritual or the like but declares that moral and spiritual qualifications--are all that are needed to make Gentiles God's people. Just because there is nothing in the prophecy about observing Jewish ceremonies, and something about longing and faith, James thinks that these are the essentials, and that the others may be dropped by the Church, as God had dropped them in the case of Cornelius, and as Amos had dropped them in his vision of the future Kingdom.²⁶

This idea seems to fit the context and would perhaps be acceptable if there was no better solution. It should be said that the argument from silence is, of its very nature, weak. Coupled with this weakness is a lack of purpose for James to alter the original prophecy and say, "after these things." If he was saying that the silence on circumcision in Messianic Kingdom prophecy was the ground for omitting circumcision in the Church, then why did he not use the words of the prophecy, "in that day"? Evidently he was trying to indicate sequence of some nature or another.

Therefore, the writer believes that the "fulfilment in sequence view" most completely fits the context. James was not quoting the prophecy as being directly relevant to the present. He was outlining the course of events as they were developing and would continue to develop. Hence, the force of the question lies in its enlightening the listeners as to God's plan. Peter had declared one thing. God was taking out Gentiles and putting them on the same level as the Jews. He put "no difference between" them (Acts 15:9). This was not out of harmony with those things which would follow according to Amos.

When everything is put in its rightful place and order, there will be no problem with circumcision and other ordinances. God will reveal the necessary requisites for each period

in the proper place and time. Walvoord asserts, "The passage, instead of identifying God's purpose for the Church and for the nation of Israel, established a specific time order."²⁷

Thirdly, a proper exegesis of the passage lends force to this view. James said that Peter had "declared" that God had first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name in the house of Cornelius. The word translated "declare" means literally to "lead out." It is the verbal root of the noun from which we get the English word "exegesis." Of the six times it is used in the New Testament, five times it is translated "declared." In this sense it may mean only a recounting of certain facts (Acts 10:8, 15:12), or it may suggest an unfolding of hidden truths. Moulton and Milligan agree concerning this latter usage in that numerous examples of the technical use of this verb "denotes the communication of divine and other secrets."²⁸ According to Thayer it is "used in Greek writings of the interpretation of things sacred and divine, oracles, dreams, etc."²⁹

John uses it in this way when he says that, "no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son...He hath declared Him" (John 1:18). He means that the Son revealed, exegeted, or interpreted the Father to men as none other could do or had done. It is in this same sense that James uses the word. He does not mean that Peter was merely recounting his experience at the house of Cornelius, but he was unfolding truths which had been hidden to former generations. Peter had announced how God had saved the Gentiles and put no difference between them and the Jews. Though this had not been made known to men in other ages (Eph. 3:5), now it was declared. Since it had formerly been hidden, how could the Old Testament prophecy be appealed to for support? The declaration of Peter was one thing. What the prophet had to say was another. Therefore, the harmony between the two had to do with something other than content. Historical sequence is being emphasized.

The word translated "agree" means literally "to be in harmony or accord with." It is never used in the New Testament as an introductory formula for an Old Testament quotation or prophetic fulfilment. Therefore, because of the absence of such usage, the passage must make it very plain that a fulfilment is intended. In this case, such clear evidence is wanting.

The sequence of events is expressed in the phrase, "after these things." These were not the prophet's words. Amos wrote, "In that day..." Obviously James was not attempting a literal quotation of the prophet. He rather sought to adapt the prophecy to the situation at hand. Actually, he was indicating that which was to precede the events about which the prophet spoke. That which was to precede is marked out in v. 14 by the word "first." This word in the original language is used over and over in the New Testament to indicate that which is first in a series of events. In listing some of the gifts, Paul wrote, "And God hath set some in the church, first (in a series) apostles, secondarily prophets, ..." (I Cor. 12:28). James says that the wisdom which is from above "is first (in a series of listed characteristics) pure, then peaceable, gentle, ..." (James 3:17). In the passage under study James says that Peter has revealed how God first (in a series of events) visited the Gentiles with salvation by grace through faith plus nothing, and next or "after this" the Lord will return and build again the tabernacle of David.

It should be further pointed out in opposition to the first view listed that the prophecy has not yet been fulfilled as indicated by the phrase, "I will return." This was not a part of the

prophecy but was added by James in the future tense to indicate that what the prophet had said was still future. The spiritualizing method which suggests that "His returning is an image of their (God's people) restoration to His favor and to prosperity"³⁰ must be rejected. No Scriptural support can be given for this view. Walvoord is right when he says,

Israel's blessing will not come until "I return," apparently a reference to the second coming of Christ. That it could not refer either to the incarnation or to the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost is evident in that neither is a "return."³¹

Therefore, one is shut up to a definite time order. First, the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's plan for the Church, and after this the return of Christ to set up His Kingdom.

SUMMARY AND PARAPHRASE

In summary, James makes reference to Peter's declaration concerning God's first taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name. This primarily involved His plan of including both Jew and Gentile in the New Testament Church. To this, James says, the words of the prophets concerning the Messianic Kingdom agree. The time order of the events are in perfect harmony. After this period of Gentile conversion, the Lord will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David and establish His reign in the promised Messianic Kingdom. During this time Israel shall enjoy their promised blessings and the residue of men (identified as "all the Gentiles") shall seek after the Lord.

A legitimate paraphrase may read as follows: "Simeon has declared (led out in the full meaning of) how God first visited the Gentiles to take out from among them a people for (to bear) His name. And to this visitation of the Gentiles the words of the prophets agree with respect to the order of events in God's plan, as it is written, After these things pertaining to Gentile conversion under grace, I will return (in glory) and I will build again the tabernacle and throne of David which is fallen and I will build again the ruins of it and I will set it up again in the land of its former domain. That the remainder of men might seek the Lord; namely, all the Gentiles upon whom my name has been called, saith the Lord, who is doing these things" (Acts 15:14-17).

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