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“Acts 15”

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With

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Acts 15

Acts 15 is the account of the Jerusalem council, the meeting of the leadership of the church in Jerusalem, along with Paul and Barnabas, to discuss the matter of Gentile acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Some Jewish believers were of the opinion that to be truly saved, Gentiles had to essentially become Jews—i.e., submit to circumcision and follow the law of Moses (Acts 15:1, 5). Peter, Paul, and Barnabas disagreed. The chapter records the decision of the council. Part of that decision includes an important citation of the OT by James, the leader of the church at Jerusalem, which helped to settle the matter on the side of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. Nevertheless, certain stipulations were made of Gentiles, but not with respect to their salvation. This episode of the podcast takes a look at two items: (1) James' use of the OT, asking the question of how the fulfillment of OT prophecy "worked"; and (2) the nature of the stipulations on Gentiles.

Here are the papers referenced in the show:

[Glenny The Septuagint and apostolic hermeneutics Amos 9 in Acts 15](#)
[Tanner James's quotation of Amos 9 to settle the Jerusalem council debate in Acts 15](#)
[Beale Carson Acts 15](#)

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 51, Acts 15. I'm your layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing this week?

MSH: Very good. Glad to be back.

TS: Well good. I'm ready for Acts 15.

MSH: Yup, Acts 15 today and what I'm going to do, this is going to be a little different. At the beginning it will feel the same. I'm just going to read through the whole chapter. But my aims for this particular episode are a little different. This chapter has a pretty important citation of an Old Testament passage that really has implications for hermeneutics generally and specifically, since is dealing with prophecy, how prophecy does work, at least in some cases in the New Testament and that, in turn, has implications for how we should think about prophetic fulfillment in the future to ourselves.

Now the passage is going to be familiar and what I've said isn't new. I've said that before on blogs and different presentations about how the whole concept of literalism just needs definition in and of itself since it's a lot more complicated than people think in terms of literal interpretation of prophecy. So what I want to do in this episode is I'm going to try to not be overwhelming but I'm going to try to illustrate how complicated this stuff gets. And I'm going to take listeners into about what I'd call maybe 10 to 15% of the complexity in this episode. And I'm going to be referencing articles written by different people. They will have those posted with the episode so that people who are interested and frankly, you're going to need a little bit of Greek and Hebrew at least for one of them.

People who are interested can go up and look and sort of get exposed to the other 85% of why this stuff is so complicated. But I want to try to overwhelm you a little bit in the episode but not too much, just try to give you a sense of prophecy, the whole discussion about fulfillment or not, and how we should understand prophecy now is just so much more complicated than your popular prophecy teachers will impress upon you. It is just light years beyond what they're telling you. And I just want listeners to have some appreciation for that and to understand why does Mike roll his eyes when somebody says something about, oh, this passage talks about the twin towers or, oh, I'm reading this in my newspaper. That must be a fulfillment of this thing over here. I do roll my eyes because I know how complicated this gets. So that's the purpose today, to try to convey a little bit of that to listeners. So let's jump into Acts 15. This is the famous meeting in the Jerusalem Council, so first verse we have,

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers.⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them.⁵ But some

believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”

⁶The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. ⁷And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. **[MSH: Reference back to Cornelius]** ⁸And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

¹²And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. ¹⁴Simeon **[MSH: That’s Peter]** has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. ¹⁵And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, **[MSH: And this is going to be the reference to Amos 9:11-12]**

¹⁶“After this I will return,
and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen;
I will rebuild its ruins,
and I will restore it,
¹⁷that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord,
and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,
says the Lord, who makes these things ¹⁸known from of old.’

¹⁹Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, ²⁰but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. ²¹For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

²²Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barnabas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers, ²³with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. ²⁴Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling

your minds, although we gave them no instructions, ²⁵ it has seemed good to us, having come to one accord, to choose men and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: ²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

³⁰ So when they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement. ³² And Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. ³³ And after they had spent some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them. ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

³⁶ And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” ³⁷ Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. ⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

MSH: That's the end of the chapter. What I want to focus on here is the quotation. The fundamental issue of the chapter is can Gentiles essentially be saved as Gentiles without being circumcised and having to submit to the Law of Moses? That's the fundamental issue. Now the problem according to the chapter was resolved in part at least by a quotation from Amos 9. Now the issue here is Amos 9:11-12. You can look that up in a cross-reference in your Bible. You find that quote easily but here's the problem.

The Masoretic Text of the Old Testament, because he's quoting the Old Testament, but the Hebrew Masoretic Text, what that says in Hebrew is different than the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation the Old Testament. It's different in places that from the Septuagint which James apparently quotes. Now I say apparently because if you compare the Septuagint, the Septuagint text itself with the Greek that is found in Acts 15 in the quote, even those two things, even though they're both in Greek, do not completely match either. So you have an issue here. But part of my madness here in this episode is to introduce you to how complicated these sorts of things are. So even before we get to the issue, well, does James quote and interpret Amos literally?

Before we even get to that question, we have to decide what in the world is that guy quoting, and why does it change? Why does he not just, when he quotes what he quotes, is he doing it from memory? Does he have a different text of the Septuagint? He's Jewish. Why doesn't he go back to the Masoretic Text and just translate it on-the-fly? Maybe that's what he did. Who knows what in the world is going on? Well, scholars do have of a pretty good idea of what he is quoting. He is quoting the Septuagint. But James, catch this, James modifies the translation he's quoting in the moment and produces theology from it. There's theology you'll get in James' use of Septuagint Amos 9 that isn't actually in Septuagint of Amos 9 and that isn't actually in the Hebrew Masoretic text of Amos 9.

So he's literally making adjustments and doing theology in the moment and that's going to be in Scripture in the text of Acts 9 as it was either recorded by Luke or as Luke recalls it later, and that's what we have. So there's this whole issue of dissimilarity between the texts and James freedom to make slight improvisations with his translation that he's using, the Septuagint, to do theology on the fly in the moment to decide this question. And this question has a huge ripple effect in New Testament theology. Now you could say, now, before they even had the meeting, this is sort of decided because of Peter's experiences, because Paul's experienced the stuff that they relate at the counsel.

We all get that. I get that, but, again, part of the madness here is to show you that there's a lot to think about here. Because this kind of thing happens, you can't just say and you can't just assume, because it's demonstrably provable otherwise, that when the New Testament writers quote the Old Testament, they're always quoting it word for word and interpreting it literally, like they're never assigning any metaphorical meanings or they're never assigning any symbolic meanings or they're never improvising on their own. They do all of that stuff and frankly, they do all of it. James did all of it in this one instance, which is why it's sort of a go to passage. Now, let's go back to Acts 15 and get the flow again.

Again, the issue is can the Gentiles be saved as Gentiles? They don't have to do all this Jewish stuff. Now Peter, of course, chimed in and says, hey, of course they don't have to be Jews. They're Gentiles. They can be saved as Gentiles and his evidence for that is that God had given him the Spirit, he mentions that in verse 7 just like he'd given us the Spirit, that Acts 2, and Peter says, hey, that's proof that the God accepts the Gentiles as they are. Verse 8 says God knows the heart bore witness to them, to the Gentiles, by giving them the Holy Spirit just like he did to us. And Peter goes further. He says God has purified their hearts. He's made no distinction between us and them.

He's cleansed their hearts by faith. And that, in and of itself, harkens back to the Old Testament idea of being circumcised of the heart, the circumcision of the heart, which is really what God was concerned with in the first place, He wasn't concerned with physical circumcision so much as what do you believe. Where is your heart at? Where do you throw your loyalty? Do you follow the God of Israel or don't you? Do you believe that he's the God of gods or don't you? Do you believe that he is in covenant relationship with your people or don't you? You don't have Baal worshipers in heaven. I don't care if you've had the physical act of circumcision. If you go off and worship Baal, you are not mine. I don't care about your election. I don't care about your circumcision.

Circumcision was the sign of the election and all that kind of stuff. And those who are familiar with my blog, I've covered this sort of ad infinitum here, this notion that election in the Old Testament does not have to do with salvation. It's not equated to salvation. Election does

not mean salvation. Why? It's the most obvious thing in the world. Most of the elect nation, the Israelites, went off and apostatized, and that's why we had the exile. It's the most obvious thing in the world to anyone who's reading the Old Testament. So we have this fundamental disconnect and what God's really interested in is the circumcision of the heart. What do you believe? Where is your believing loyalty? Is it to me or is it to another god? That's the fundamental question. And so Peter's saying, look, God knows their hearts. He knows they have turned from whatever it was they were worshiping and following and they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Peter says that's good enough. And then Paul and Barnabas chip in and relate what they'd been doing in their ministry and that backs up Peter. And so then we get to James. Now I'm going to be referring a little bit and quoting in some instances from one of three articles that Trey will have posted, an article by Ed Glenny, who is actually my, way way back when I first started after high school in Bible college, Ed Glenny was one of my professors. He's teaching at Northwestern in St. Paul now, and I run into him every year. But I can say Ed and his wife, who was my speech teacher. Trey, we ought to do some sort of episode at some point on the miracle that it is that Mike ever did anything with his life. Because I was terrified of public speaking and I mean terrified. It's just the only word I can think of, terrified. I'm going to rabbit trail a little bit. Jackie Glenny, Ed's wife, was my speech teacher and I thought I would go to college, get a 4.0 on every class, fail speech, and never graduate. I really believe that. Our first assignment, again, this is Bible college, was give us two minutes of your testimony. I got a D, and I deserved an F. I deserved the F.

The second assignment was get up and read any passage you want. We didn't have to memorize it. We just had to read it, D. And I deserved the F. I didn't get through it. I was terror stricken. I have told that a number of times. You got to go back and tell your wife she changed my life, because we were about halfway through the class. And I had gotten D's and I am sure she gave me an F somewhere along the line. She just had to. It felt like she was cheating if she didn't. And we got to this group assignment where we had to have a meeting or something like that, and I did fine with that. It wasn't just me and she took me aside after. She let everybody leave the room and she said I want to talk to you. She looked at me and she said, what is your problem? She just gave me this, it wasn't like a tongue lashing, but it was like your mom or your older sister just giving you a couple slaps upside your head like what is your problem. She said why can't you do this and this?

She just just dressed me down the whole way. But the end of it made me feel like, wow, maybe she's right. Maybe I can actually do this. Maybe I don't actually look like I need medical attention whenever I do this. And I got through the class. I didn't fail the class, and I just got a little bit better each time. I just started to lose the fear of it and it was just a complete 180. So that's a little bit of a rabbit trail but I'll be referring to Glenny's article because Ed actually has two PhD's. One of them he got from the University of Minnesota. This was his dissertation topic, Hermeneutics in the book of Amos in the Septuagint. So Ed knows his stuff here, and I'm going to be referring to it off and on as we go. But when we hit James in verse 13, really James verses 13-21, when he stands up and then sort of makes the decision, which is why when we get around to verse 13, James replied, brothers listen to me, and he says in verse 19, therefore, my judgment is that we should do XYZ.

Apparently he was the leader of the church in Jerusalem at the time. And so he has status, and he more or less fixes the decision and part of his, the way he does this is to quote this

passage. So Glenn says, if people are listening to this actually referenced in the article. This is from page 3 in footnote 6, he mentions that, because the main Old Testament quotation, at least the gist of it, is from the Septuagint. And the argument James makes depends precisely on the difference between the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text in the quotation. A common question is whether it originated with James or the Jerusalem church. And it's often suggested that either Luke composed it, was like a stenographer of the speech, or he did it after the fact in concert with something that scholars call the Hellenistic Christian Exegetical Tradition, and I'm going to return to that thought, because there was a sort of a common expectation within the believing community, both in terms of Judaism and early Christianity, that it was permissible for you as a leader, a prophetic figure in the believing community, especially in the context like this when you have the apostles, you still have those who were the 12, most of those guys are still alive, when they understand and they come to believe, and they say that what we see happening among us right now is a fulfillment of something that was alluded to maybe in three or four places in the Old Testament, we're just going to sort of put it together here and use one passage sort of as a springboard, and really articulate fulfilled prophecy right in our presence and the theology that results.

That was okay. There's actually a strong interpretive tradition of doing that, both in Judaism and in the early church as well. So Glenn alludes to that. I want to plant that in your mind as we proceed here. When you look at James, there are differences between the Hebrew text and the Septuagint. So let's start there. If you look in the Hebrew text and you go to Amos chapter 9, if you have an English translation that's fairly literal, the ESV or the King James or something like that, the Masoretic text would say something like, in verse 11, 'in that day, I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen,' the booth of David or the tent of David that is fallen. Now Hebrew, booth is probably a better translation. The Septuagint does use the Greek word that's used 436 times for a tent, so the Septuagint uses the word tent. Now the question is, what is that supposed to mean, that they have to raise up the booth of David or the tent of David that is fallen? And the rest of the quote, rest of verse of Amos talks about rebuilding its ruins and restoring it and whatnot.

What is it talking about? Well, if you're a literalist, I like to ask the question this way. When you see the word booth, what is the first thing that comes to mind, booth of David? If we're honest, probably maybe his house, maybe booth of David, especially if you're reading the Septuagint and you saw the word for tent, you might think tabernacle. You're thinking of a tent because that's literalism, a tent or a hut. And if you were reading in the Septuagint, especially, you would be thinking tabernacle because this word in the Greek is used hundreds of times for the tabernacle, portable sanctuary. So literalism, whether you're a Masoretic text reader or a Septuagint reader, would sort of make you mentally go down the same path, temple, tabernacle, whatnot, especially with verbs like rebuilding its ruins and restoring and rebuilding, that sort of thing, fallen, it's fallen. Well, guess what? When James actually quotes this, it's not about a tent. It's not about a tabernacle.

It's not about any physical structure at all. The booth of David, the tent of David to James is Jesus. It's the resurrected Jesus. That's what's been rebuilt and restored, the Davidic dynasty, because Jesus is the Davidic Messiah. So the booth of David, the tent of David, is actually David's household, his family, his dynasty, which converges, the outcome of that is the Messiah, is Jesus. So it's a very abstract, some would even say convoluted trajectory. I think abstract is a better word. It's a very abstract sort of metaphorical idea to be looking at Amos and

seeing booth of David or tent of David and coming out with Jesus the Messiah. You don't really have a reflexive literalistic feel to it.

So the verse promises, at least according to the Septuagint according to James, that verse promised a future restoration of David's dynasty and the kingdom over which it rules, just like it was in former times. It's the reestablishment of the kingdom of God. Now verse 14 gives you another little hint here. In Amos, 'I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel.' If you recall, the dynasty of David was from Judah and the kingdom split, and the 10 tribes of the North went off into exile and were scattered all over the world. But Amos in verse 14, if Amos is talking about rebuilding the dynasty of David, David ruled over all 12 tribes. Amos says, I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, all the tribes. Well, how do we get the regathering of all the tribes? How do we do that?

Again, people will reflexively say, well, that's the millennial kingdom or that's 1948 when Israel was reestablished as a nation. Look, you know what it is? It's Acts 2. It's Jews scattered all over the world coming back to Jerusalem at Pentecost, hearing the gospel, getting saved, taking the gospel back to the nations in which they lived, and kickstarting the kingdom of God. It's Jews everywhere, regardless of whether they're Judahites or not. They're scattered among the Gentiles and this was God's technique. This is God's strategy of infiltration of the nations that needed to be reclaimed, because of the whole Babel event, the Deuteronomy 32 worldview. So we've gone one verse, in that day I'll raise up the booth of David and we've gotten the Messiah, the kingdom of God, and the reclaiming of all 12 tribes and the nations out of one phrase. This is how James' mind is working, because when he quotes the second part of Amos, he has the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord. All the Gentiles are called by my name.' You think, where is he getting this stuff?

He's not getting it from a strictly literal reading. He's getting it because he's using the Septuagint instead of the Masoretic text, and he's reading it abstractly and metaphorically. I would say he's reading it theologically, which is good theology. Now in verse 12 of Amos, the next verse, if you read the Hebrew text, let's just read it, verses 11-12 back to back. This is the Hebrew text now. 'In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the nations who are called by my name, declares the Lord who does this.' Think about that. I'll read it again. I'm going to raise up the booth of David that is fallen. If that means the Davidic dynasty, keep that in mind, verse 12, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name. I think it's pretty easy for at least listeners to this podcast to see that in the Hebrew text would have the booth of David, the dynasty of David, being revived and Edom brought back into the fold. Who is Edom? It's the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. Jacob is Israel. Esau, you know, the whole birthright thing.

Edom will be brought back into the fold and so will all the nations who are called by my name. It's the reclaiming of the nations, the Deuteronomy 32 worldview. So this is the prophecy, and you say, well, how in the world can we do all that with Jesus and the Gentiles? Well, isn't that what Acts 2 is about? Isn't that what the gospel is about, reclaiming the nations by extracting from every one of them people who will embrace the Messiah and spread the kingdom of God under the authority of the King who is the Davidic Messiah? Isn't that what was actually happening? But here's the rub though. When James quotes it, he doesn't say that they may possess the remnants of Edom. The Septuagint doesn't say that. The Septuagint says pretty

much what James has here. It says that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord. So now you don't have the Israelites, the Davidic dynasty, seeking and possessing Edom. Instead, you've got the remnant of mankind seeking the Lord.

This subject and the object of who's doing the seeking and who's being sought are reversed. They're inverted 180° and the word for Edom is changed to mankind. If you know Hebrew, you're going to know Edom is *aleph, dalet, and mem*. Those consonants minus the o-vowel, the long o-vowel are the same as the word for *adam*, which is mankind. Apparently, the Septuagint translator saw only a consonantal text and did not know or did not translate it as Edom. He translated it as mankind, and James uses that translation, which would actually be incorrect based on the Hebrew text. James uses that translation to make a correct theological point. Now you could get the theology, just as I did a few minutes ago, you can get to the same theological place using Edom. You could say it's the Davidic dynasty bringing the Edomites back, the descendants of Esau, another part of the family of God again, and all the nations are going to be reclaimed, and we're all one big happy family of God. We're one big happy kingdom of God and the Davidic King, the Messiah, you can get the same theology as James does, but James is using a text that has a translation instead *adom*, it's *adam* in the translator's mind, and he translates it *mankind*, the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord and all the Gentiles who are called by my name.

So he is actually using a translation that messes up a word but the theology is correct, and the theology could have been obtained had he used the Hebrew text anyway. But the idea is you can't just get to these ideas by 1 to 1 word correspondences with the thing that pops into your head most immediately, in other words, literalism, or the way we reimagine literalism to work. Now I want to say a little bit about literalism because to be honest with you, I think it's a concept that people think is easy but is actually kind of a convoluted concept. So think to yourself, what exactly does literalism mean? If you were going to sort of define literalism, how would you do it? What are some of the ways you would explain it? I'm going to suggest something to you. Let's take a word like *run*. Let's just go with the word *run*. It's an easy word, something that isn't too hard to understand. We think, well, if I said the word *run*, what does that mean? What does it actually mean?

You'll say, well, that's easy. It means to move faster than walking. Of course that's what *run* means, and I would suggest to you, well, that probably isn't the case. That probably is not the case because you don't really know for sure until you have a context what the word *run* means. We've all heard this little ditty, if the plain sense makes good sense then seek no other sense. It's an argument for literalism. Does the word *run*, which use of the word *run* in the examples I'm going to give you makes the most sense, makes the plainest sense> I run a business. Run, don't walk. My nose is running. Our team scored a run. The short answer is all of those make very plain sense in a certain context. No meaning of *run* is more plain than any other meaning of *run*. This idea that literalism suggests that when you see a word, the thing that you associate first and foremost primarily with that word, then that's the plain sense. That's the literal meaning, and that's the meaning you should track, you should focus on your Bible interpretation.

In many cases, that won't lead you to plain sense. It will lead you to nonsense. There's just more to it than that and you look a passage like Acts 15 with what James is doing here. And he's not just gravitating to the most transparent "obvious" thing that the words would tell them, because if he was doing that, he would read tent of David in the Septuagint and have to do

something with it, either house, a physical structure, tabernacle. Maybe it is a metaphorical reference to the Temple. And I know that there a lot of people out there, maybe even some were listening to the podcast, either they believe this or that heard it, that this verse, Amos 9-11, in that day I will raise up the booth of David or the tent of David, tabernacle, whatever, they would use that verse and say that that talks about the rebuilding of a temple in the millennium. I assign this. In the online courses that I teach at Liberty, this is one of the discussion board assignments and I can tell you right now that 95% of the students, the question is very straightforward, read Acts 15, is that a prophecy that's been fulfilled or is it something to be future? 95% of them will say it's the future and they'll start talking about the millennium. They never even looked up the cross-references.

They never even look up the fact it was quoting some other Old Testament passage. When they look at Amos, that's the passage I actually give them, and I say what does that refer to, they never find the fact that it's quoted in Acts 15 because they're just taught to think one way about words, about passages, and instead of looking, reading Amos 8, rebuild the booth of David, the tent of David, whatever English translation they happen to be using, instead of thinking, boy, I wonder if the New Testament writers ever do anything with that? I wonder if they ever quoted it in the New Testament. I wonder if anybody in the New Testament ever interprets that for us. They never asked the question. What they do is they just filter Amos 9:11 through the theology they've been taught. They come out with the rebuilding of a temple in a future millennial kingdom in Israel.

That's just where they go. And James, if James was their professor, he'd give them an F because that is not what it means. He gets to a totally different place and his place actually makes good theological sense, and it ought to because he's an apostle. He has some help here in the context, the spirit and all that. We look at it and we wonder what he's thinking. Well, if we give it some thought, if we put it in its wider biblical theological worldview, we can see how they get there. But the point is, don't make assumptions. Don't make assumptions about the way fulfillment language works and how prophecy works. Don't assume that there's a one-to-one correspondence literalism thing going on. Sometimes there is. Sometimes there is not. It just depends. I'll give you another example I like to bring up. Matthew in Matthew 2:15 says, when he's talking about the return of the little, he's more than an infant, he's a toddler, little boy Jesus coming back from Egypt with Joseph and Mary after they had fled to Egypt to get away from Herod.

When Matthew's related that story of their journey back to Israel from Egypt he says. 'This happened that the words the prophet might be fulfilled. Out of Egypt, I have called my son.' That's a quotation of Hosea 11:1 exactly. It's word for word. But guess what? Hosea 11:1 isn't even a prophecy. It doesn't predict anything. It doesn't even look to the future. It actually looks backward into the past because Hosea 11:1 is about the Exodus of Israel, who was also called the son of God in the book of Exodus. It looks back to the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. And you say, well, what in the world is Matthew thinking there? Again, that's a subject for another time. I've blogged that one as well. But there's no way that you can look at Hosea 11:1 and "literally" get the return of baby Jesus with Mary and Joseph. There's just no way that works, and yet this is fulfillment.

Prophecy is actually fulfilled in a variety of ways. You have analogies that are struck. You have metaphors that are articulated and used and explained. You have symbols that mean something in the context of the wider Old Testament worldview. You have what James is doing

here, taking a metaphorical reference and really interpreting that reference by the wider picture of Old Testament theology, and even more importantly, things that he sees happening in his own life. He sees Gentiles believing in Jesus and getting the Spirit just like they did. And he concludes, correctly, that you know what? This is the reclaiming of the nations. This is, we have Jesus who rose from the dead.

He is the ultimate outcome of the dynasty of David. He is the Messiah. He rose from the dead and in it's through him that all these exiled peoples, whether it be the Edomites or people of other nations, the full-blown Gentiles, they are being brought back. And he quotes the passage and interprets it on-the-fly in the moment and articulates the theology. It goes well beyond, oh, what does tent mean? Let me do a word study on tent. In the 463 times that have it, it's the tabernacle because that's the literal read. None of that even counted. None of that even mattered. It wasn't really even applicable. So again you just have to realize that this is really really really complicated. Now the last thing I want to touch on are the stipulations that are put on the Gentiles. Even this has a very sensible explanation because you could say, well, if they could be saved, if the Gentiles could be saved as Gentiles, why are they even asking them to do these four things?

Isn't that works salvation? Well, no actually not because in verse 29, the letter that they sent says, if you do these things, you'll do well. It'll be good. You'll be okay. Everybody will get along. It doesn't say you'll be saved. That's not what the letter says. Now it's generally recognized, Glenn paraphrases or summarizes this really nicely in his article, generally recognized that the four prohibitions that the letter, the apostolic decree for the Jerusalem Council, they come from Leviticus 17 starting in verse 1 going all the way through chapter 18, which ends in verse 30. So Leviticus 17 and 18 is where these four things come from. Now what's less clear is why those four were chosen, and how could they be related to the quotation from Amos.

Glenny writes this, he says, "Leviticus 17-18 in Masoretic text contains five appearances of the phrase, now catch this, "the alien living among them," or among you, Leviticus 17:8, 10, 12, 13, then 18:26. Glenn continues, "the appearances of this phrase are connected to four different prohibitions in these chapters for Gentiles living in Israel," in other words, living among the people of God. "Two are connected to the same prohibition." That's Leviticus 17:10 and 12. "As a result, there are four things that are prohibited of the 'alien living among you' in the book of Leviticus. And they happen to correspond in the same order even to the four prohibitions of the apostolic letter." And here are the four. Remember that you abstain from you what had been sacrificed to idols, the meat that had been sacrificed to idols in verse 29. These are all going to Acts 15:29.

They're all listed in one verse. But the reference to what was sacrificed to idols comes from Leviticus 17:8-9. The reference to blood comes from Leviticus 17:10 and 12. The reference to meat from animals that had been strangled comes from Leviticus 17:13. And the reference to sexual morality comes from Leviticus 18:26, which refers back to a long list of prohibitions in Leviticus 18:6-23. Here's the point. Glenn says, "This demonstrates that although Gentile Christians are not under the law, the Jewish scriptures still have authority to render this decision. The decision that is made concerning Gentiles in Acts 15 is based finally on those Scriptures, which speak directly to the situation under consideration." What do we do with Gentiles who are now part of the people of God? They are among us. They are living among us.

What do we do now, because we're not going to tell them they have to become Jews. They don't need to get circumcised.

They don't have to obey the whole law of Moses. So what do we do? What do we do to make this good, to help the party of the Pharisees feel comfortable? Well, you know what they do? They go to the Old Testament. They go to Leviticus 17 and 18 and say, you know what? The Old Testament had the circumstances where foreigners were living among the people of God and here are the things that to make this relationship work so as to not offend the Israelites, they had the foreigners do these things. They didn't have them be circumcised. They didn't say you had to do the Sabbath. They didn't say you have to be us. They didn't say you have to be Jews. What they did say was, look, stay away from this stuff sacrificed to idols. Don't consume blood and stuff that was strangled. Don't do that stuff, and even God forbid you watch your morality or sexual morality. And if you do these things, you're a foreigner living among us here in the Old Testament world of Leviticus, the Israelites, you're welcome to be here if you just observe these things.

You don't have to become us. You don't have to be circumcised. You don't have to be Sabbath keepers. You don't have to become Israelites. But you're welcome to stay if you just watch these four things. And that's exactly what James and the Council recommend. They go right back to the Old Testament and while not telling them they have to be Jews, now, to be saved. They don't tell them that at all. They say, look, we're going to use the Old Testament as precedent. We're going to let the word of God handle this situation. We're going to answer this question the same way they would've answered it back then. You know what? Everybody will be happy. You'll do well, farewell. And that's what they do. So it is actually extremely coherent, extremely well thought, well-conceived what they do, because the Pharisees know Leviticus 17-18. They know the law.

Good grief, they're the Pharisees. Half of them think they wrote it. They know what it says and they can see what the apostles, the leadership among this thing we call Christianity. They're trying to honor the Old Testament. That's the Bible they have. They don't have any of the other stuff and what can they say? The Old Testament is not good enough? They can't say any of that and so it's a very wise, very Scripturally driven conclusion, decision that they make. And yet the gospel is intact. These people, these Gentiles, are, God knows their heart. They believe exactly what they need to believe and what we need to believe, and we are all part of one family of God, no matter where we originate from. So that was a bit different. I realize that a lot of it was complicated.

A lot of it was convoluted. But if you go back, I'm recommending listener go back, and take a look at Glenn's article and read through it. Some of the other ones don't have as much Greek and Hebrew in it and you'll be able to do just fine. But get the notion that what's happening between the Testaments and in part it's affected by the fact that they're seeing fulfillment right then. This isn't theory for them. They're looking at it. And James, you can get to the theology either way but James uses the Septuagint. It's different than the Hebrew text, and he even improvises what he's doing in the quotation to articulate this is what's happening. Jesus has risen. The booth of David, the tent of David, has been re-erected. It's him, it's the Messiah. The tribes are now being united, and the Gentiles are being brought back into the fold. So he uses two verses from Amos to try to articulate that and give the Old Testament roots and authority. And then when it comes to the stipulations, he does exactly the same thing, trying to

give it the authority of the Scriptures, because it's the only Scriptures they have and make a decision. And I think they made a good one and you can understand how they got there.

TS: Okay, I have two thoughts. On verse 28-29 that you're talking about, why did they have to do anything? I mean, it's more about getting along with them.

MSH: It's more about getting along.

TS: So it's not really requirements necessary to be saved. It's just...

MSH: No. In fact, they don't say, if you keep yourselves from these things, verse 29, you'll be saved. He says you'll do well. This is wise. Get along and we're asking you to get along with these specific stipulations because this is the way it would have been answered back in the Old Testament times, when we had foreigners living among us that wanted to live among the people of God. This is how we handled it.

TS: And my second thought is to all you future students listening to the show because you just gave them answered your question about Acts 15 and prophecy.

MSH: Yeah, if they listen it'd be good for them. Their effort will be rewarded. But it's just something as simple as look at the cross-references. They're actually there for a reason. The publishers who put out study Bibles don't say, man, we got a middle column here that's white. Let's like throw stuff in there. Let's clutter it with something. I got an idea. Let's throw in verse references in there. No, they're actually there for a reason to draw your eye back to important things and hopefully you'll see where quotations are the same or where there not different, what's going on. You start asking questions and doing a little thing we like to call Bible study as opposed to just Bible reading.

TS: Can you break it down and summarize that just a little bit more in layman terms, reading that rather than actual building of David but actually being Jesus? What does that do for me as I'm reading that, the layman?

MSH: James's response is he sees in it two verses in Amos the events that they had just lived through, that this "booth of David" is not a literal structure. It's a reference to David's house and God promised David that only your descendants will have the legitimate right to sit on the throne of Jerusalem, only your descendants. We call it the Davidic Covenant. And so James has seen the son of David come, be crucified and be raised again, and he had seen him after the resurrection. He had seen him before Pentecost. And that son of David had said, 'You go and you wait because the Spirit is going to come.' And the Spirit does come at Pentecost and they're enabled to speak in all these other languages. They are able to take the message of the Gospel, through Jews who have gathered in Pentecost, and then go back to where they been scattered for centuries.

They're going to take the message back to the nations and people everywhere, Jew or Gentile, are going to be accepted by God if they believe the message of the Gospel. And James sees all of that. He just lived through all of it and he sees it in these two verses of Amos. And it's

hard for us to see it because we're thinking too literalistically. He had a little help because he was living in the events of the day. Peter said, hey, look, what God called clean don't call unclean. God showed me this vision. I went to see this guy named Cornelius. And they had the Spirit just like we did. Paul and Barnabus said the same thing.

Everywhere we go, and if you think about where we've tracked in the podcast, they go to all these places that have significance, Samaria. You have these, Damascus, you have these places that have Old Testament histories that a statement needs to be made that we didn't miss this place. This place, too, there are people here who are mine and I'm going to use them to regather all the tribes and regather the nations into one big family called the people of God. And so he lived that and so he parses the two verses by what he'd been experiencing firsthand with Jesus and the coming of the Spirit.

TS: And did you say that this is the only nonliteral reference in the Bible?

MSH: Prophecy is a mixed bag. You will get some statements by New Testament writers thus and thus happens so that it was fulfilled by the word of this or that prophet or prophets plural, and then they'll sort of mix verses. And you'll go back, I recommend to people go back and look at what their quoted, and in many cases, it'll be pretty strictly word for word. But there'll be other places where you look at it and go what in the world is this guy thinking. It doesn't say that in the original passage or it sort of says that but the meaning he's getting from it is like, man, I would've never thought of that. Or like in Hosea 11, and that's not even a prophecy, is looking backward in time, not forward. What is Matthew thinking? Prophecy works in a variety of ways.

The New Testament writers looked at the Old Testament and saw analogies to what Jesus had done or said. They looked back and they said, okay, I can actually give you a chapter and verse for that one. Here it is. It doesn't always work the same way but we've been taught that there's this one-to-one correspondence. There's this utterly literalistic relationship between what the New Testament writers are saying and teaching and what they're quoting in the Old Testament, as though you could just read the Old Testament and get New Testament theology out of it. It's that silly. Newsflash here, even after the resurrection, the disciples didn't understand that the Messiah was supposed to die and rise again. You can't just read the Old Testament and get this stuff okay?

This is why I've talked in the past about this concept of the messianic mosaic, that the prophetic elements, the profile, the Messiah, is never in one place. The ideas are never conglomerated in one place. Personally, I think prophecy is deliberately cryptic because of the powers of darkness were needed to be kept in the dark when it came to the mission of Jesus anyway. But you can't just read Old Testament passages and get everything that you see in New Testament theology. Anybody who's read the Bible a few times sort of knows that already. And the reason is because literalism in a number places just doesn't work. And so since it doesn't work in some places, we shouldn't pretend that it always works and we shouldn't pretend that now when we look at prophecies that are still yet future to us, we shouldn't pretend that everything is going to happen in some literalistic mode.

The honest truth is, we have no idea. We will not understand how prophecy yet future to us worked until we were on the other side, just like the apostles. They could only put together in hindsight, and even then, the post-resurrection appearances, Jesus had to open their minds.

Even then, they still needed help and that's exactly how it's going to be the second time around. So anybody that tells you they've got the prophetic timeline figured out and they know this verse here in revelation, it means this and this is how it's going to get fulfilled, and this is how it was fulfilled back in 1948 or something, look, just don't even bother. We're not going to know until after the fact. It's going to be just like it was the first time. Why would we expect any different since we can't count on one-to-one literalism? We might guess right a few times if we use that method. But since we can't count on it, because it didn't work the first time, why should we expect it to work that way the second time? It's a foolish assumption.

TS: How important is cross-referencing with the advent of the software? Can you imagine doing that before computers?

MSH: You couldn't. This is why, again, a little rabbit trail, the Masoretes, the scribal families who copied and transmitted the Old Testament during, even till now but especially during the Middle Ages, they came up with their own system of notation. There wasn't cross-references because they didn't have chapter and verse references. But they knew the text so well that they could put like the first letter of a word in a margin and you were supposed to just know that okay I see that letter there and that's the first letter of this word of this verse, and I just know by memory where all the other occurrences of that word are. Really? They just had phenomenal memories because it's a pre-TV culture. Not only didn't they have the distraction, but this is what they did. This is what they lived for. They were a special class. They passed on the skill and they would devote the Old Testament in Hebrew to memory so they could do this kind of work. It wasn't just show off. They needed that skill and the knowledge to do the kinds of things they did.