

**Old Testament Visions of Ecclesiology:  
Are the Dispensationalists Right about the Acts 15 “Tabernacle of David”?**  
Gregg Strawbridge, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract* - This paper considers the dispensational reading of the Tabernacle of David prophecy in Amos 9 and Acts 15. I consider the alternatives to the “millennial” fulfillment of this prophecy, especially addressing the original Davidic worship setting, concluding that a biblical theology of “Zion” forms a foundational concept for ecclesiology.

### **Introduction**

The text of Acts 15:14-19 provides a fascinating intersection of the hermeneutics of OT/NT continuity, MT vs LXX textual matters, eschatology, the relationship of Israel and the Church, and important themes of biblical theology. It arises in a context which is critical and foundational for the historic development of Gentile inclusion into the apostolic Church. While so much has been written on these passages, this paper will focus on the ecclesial and biblical theology dimensions.<sup>2</sup>

Acts 15:13–19 - After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Brethren, listen to me. 14 “Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. 15 “With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, 16 ‘AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE Tabernacle of David WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, 17 SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,’ 18 SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO. 19 “Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles... (NASB 1995, as will be all other citations unless otherwise noted).

### **The Classical Dispensational View**

C. I. Scofield famously wrote, “Dispensationally this is the most important passage in the N.T. It gives the divine purpose for this age, and for the beginning of the next.”<sup>3</sup>

Charles Ryrie explained, “James specifies that the prophecy of Amos will be fulfilled AFTER THESE THINGS, i.e., after the present worldwide witness. Then, after the return of Christ, the Tabernacle of David (in the millennial kingdom) will be established, and Jew and Gentile will know the Lord. James assured the council that God’s program for Israel had not been abandoned by the coming of Gentiles into the church.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Pastor of All Saints Church, Lancaster, PA. Director of [WordMp3.com](http://WordMp3.com): [www.allsaints-church.com](http://www.allsaints-church.com) \* [www.WordMp3.com](http://www.WordMp3.com) \* [wgs@wordmp3.com](mailto:wgs@wordmp3.com). This paper was presented at the 2016 Evangelical Theological Society Eastern Region meeting in Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>2</sup> For the textual issues (NT/MT/LXX) (though not for the subject of this paper), I recommend W. Edward Glenny, “Gentiles and the People of God: A Study of Apostolic Hermeneutics and Theology in Acts 15,” presented at 2006 national Evangelical Theological Society meeting, available online, [www.ntresources.com/documents/Amos9inActs15b.pdf](http://www.ntresources.com/documents/Amos9inActs15b.pdf). Longenecker states, “But while the text of Amos 9:11-12 differs from the MT in meaning and the LXX in form, ‘it is exactly identical with that of 4QFlor,’ as de Waard has shown (pp. 24-26, 47, 78-79).” Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts* (EBC 9; ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), n.p.

<sup>3</sup> C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), 1169.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, ed., *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Expanded, Accordance electronic ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), n.p.

Stanley Toussaint provides the rationale for this millennial fulfillment reading. He argues “return” (*anastrepso*) used in Acts 15:16 “means an actual return . . . it describes a literal, bodily return. Since God’s Son has not yet returned bodily, this rebuilding has not taken place.” He says, “The church was a mystery, a truth not revealed to Old Testament saints (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:5-6; Col. 1:24-27); so the church would not be referred to in Amos.”<sup>5</sup> Hence, Amos and James refer to the millennium as the time in which the Tabernacle of David will be rebuilt.

Edward Glenny (citing Moulton) explains the “sequence.” “After these things” means after Gentiles are “allowed in the church.” “I will return” means Christ’s second coming, ending “God’s program with the church.” “I will rebuild” is “the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant in Christ’s Millennium.” Glenny cites Moulton to explain, “Since Gentiles will be allowed into the Millennium after the return of Christ, there is no problem with the present allowance of Gentiles into the church.”<sup>6</sup>

Thomas Ice concludes, “The important thing to note is that James quotes an Old Testament passage that speaks of Gentile salvation in the millennium. The implication is that if Gentiles are going to be saved as Gentiles, without converting to Judaism, in the millennium, then Gentiles do not need to convert to Judaism in order to be saved in the present church age.”<sup>7</sup>

For many readers of Acts, this logic is quite allusive. Given the Judaizer debate (at the time), how is the salvation of Gentiles in the future millennium (per the premillennial view) an explanation for Gentile inclusion (then)? In this view the text would read as follows:

“With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, in the future millennial kingdom after the return of Christ [after a seven year tribulation, following the rapture, and the mark of the beast, etc.], I will rebuild the Tabernacle of David which is the restoration of Israel. . . . [that’s why circumcision is not required now].”

Dispensational critics from Oswald Allis onward have taken this reading to task on many exegetical points.<sup>8</sup> This passage is also another brick in the wall of progressive dispensationalism’s reaction to classic dispensational or Scofieldian view. Darrell Bock questions how a millennial fulfillment of Amos 9/Acts 15 makes sense of the present inclusion of Gentiles, saying “this” and “after this” per the traditionalist reading is “forced and [goes] against the normal reading of such constructions.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Toussaint, Stanley D. “Acts” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., (Accordance electronic ed. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), n.p.

<sup>6</sup> Glenny (29) cites Brian K. Moulton, “The Use of the Davidic Covenant in Acts 15” (Ph. D. diss. Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas Texas, 1999), 204-56.

<sup>7</sup> A PEOPLE FOR HIS NAME IN ACTS 15, available at <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/a-people-for-his-name-in-acts-15>

<sup>8</sup> Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church: An Examination of the Claim of Dispensationalists that the Christian Church is a Mystery Parenthesis which Interprets the Fulfillment to Israel of the Kingdom Prophecies of the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1978).

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Glenny, Darrell L. Bock, “Evidence from Acts” in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus*, eds. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 194-97.

While I need not rehearse all such criticisms here, I must point out a striking inconsistency in the logic. The usual dispensational logic goes, “*What happens in the millennium stays in the millennium.*” E.g., no new covenant now, no kingdom now, no reigning of Christ now, etc. — that happens in the millennium. Despite all the NT teaching about one body (Jew-Gentile), inclusion of Gentiles into the promises of Abraham (Gal. 3, Eph. 2), the current reign of Christ (Acts 2), and so much more, in the millennium (so says classic dispensationalism) things are different than in this “church age.”

The mode of Gentile inclusion turns out to be no small part of the dynamics of the church age. Yet in this case, “what happens in Vegas is not staying in Vegas.” For it is argued that Gentile inclusion (without circumcision) in the millennium is now normative for the church age. The principle they offer is that since X happens in the millennium, then X is normative in the church age. But this is precisely contradictory to the unique, dispensational, premillennial conception of the millennium. Reading the NT, the postmillennial or amillennial interpreter asks, how can there be a physical temple in the millennium, contra Hebrews 9-10? How can blood sacrifices occur in the millennium? How can the kingdom only be present in the millennium? How can Christ’s reign only be in the millennium? How can the new covenant only be in the millennium? How can the rule of Christ be through physical violence (“rod of iron,” per a premillennial reading)?<sup>10</sup>

The teaching that “if Gentiles are going to be saved as Gentiles, without converting to Judaism, in the millennium, then Gentiles do not need to convert to Judaism in order to be saved in the present church age” (Ice), is a *Realized Eschatology principle*. This is not an “already-not-yet” example, but a wholly “already” reality. The only way to avoid this is to admit that OT prophecies are fulfilled in the events reported in Acts 15. But this contradicts the dispensational “mystery” teaching about the Church (e.g., “The church was a mystery, a truth not revealed to Old Testament saints,” Toussaint). So either this is “realized eschatology” or there are OT visions of ecclesiology prophetically fulfilled in the NT. Either is a serious internal problem for classical dispensational theology.

### **The “Church” View**

Against the “forced” (Bock says) reading of classic dispensationalism on Acts 15, many interpreters conclude, James must be citing Amos 9 as fulfilled in the expanding Church. That is, after all, the explicit context for citing the prophecy. While dispensational writers argue against this “Church view,” a consensus of commentators accept this. Marshall says, “Probably the rebuilding of the tabernacle is to be understood as a reference to the raising up of the church as the new place of divine worship which replaced the temple (cf. Jas 6:13f. note). The church is then the means by which the Gentiles may come to know the Lord...”<sup>11</sup> Williams says that James interpreted “the house of David of his church and the prophecy as a whole of the church gathering to itself all the nations...”<sup>12</sup> It appears that only dispensational writers create an artifice of millennial fulfillment. Without a millennial framework already in mind, it is hard to see how the original hearer of Scripture would conclude “after this” and “I will rebuild” means

---

<sup>10</sup> This reflects only classical dispensationalism views, not the “progressive dispensational” migration from many of these staunch positions.

<sup>11</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC 5; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 266-267.

<sup>12</sup> David J. Williams, *Acts* (NIBC 5; Accordance electronic ed. 18 vols.; Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990), 265.

“in the millennium.” Rather, “this” (Gentile salvation reported and anticipated, Acts 15:15) fulfills Amos 9:11.

### **The Referent of “Tent/Tabernacle of David”**

My concern especially regards the referent of “Tent/Tabernacle of David.” Glenny (a progressive dispensationalist) summarized the views of many commentators, concluding, “‘David’s fallen tent’ is apparently a reference to the Davidic kingdom/dynasty.”<sup>13</sup> This stands against classical dispensational views on the referent, but he nonetheless has a millennial fulfillment. In a helpful note he summarizes a number of commentators.<sup>14</sup> Glenny concludes that “it seems to be used metaphorically for the dynasty and kingdom of David.”<sup>15</sup> Craig S. Keener says, “‘Tabernacle of David’ (Amos 9:11) probably means the ‘house [line] of David,’ fallen into such pitiable disrepair that it is called merely a tabernacle (KJV, NASB), or tent (NIV).”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, David Peterson says, “This refers to the restoration of the ‘house’ or family of David and thus to the promised Davidic kingdom.”<sup>17</sup> Another view is that of Richard Bauckham, who urges that “tent” is the construction of the eschatological temple.<sup>18</sup>

### **Is it a House or a Tent?**

The text calls this David’s “tent,” not “house.” It is argued, “The word ‘tent’ (*sukkah*) refers to a rude shelter (a ‘hut’) and pictures the ‘house’ of David that was becoming a dilapidated shack; in Amos’s time the Davidic dynasty had fallen so low that it could no longer be called a house.”<sup>19</sup> Keil and Delitzsch observe, “If the family of David no longer dwells in a palace, but in a miserable fallen hut, its regal sway must have come to an end.”<sup>20</sup>

The argument for “house” (left somewhat unexamined) asserts that a broken down house is called a tent. But does this explain the literary references to houses and tents in Scripture? Is this

---

<sup>13</sup> Glenny, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Glenny [Footnote #9]: “So Robert B. Chisholm, *Interpreting the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), p. 104; Shalom M. Paul, *A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), pp. 290-1; and Richard S. Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos* (London: SPCK, 1969), pp. 270 and 320; Smith, Amos, pp. 378-9 takes it as the Davidic kingdom. Hans Walter Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 352, suggests it could refer to the Davidic dynasty, the southern kingdom of Judah as a destroyed state, or the fallen empire of David; he seems to settle on a “Davidic imperium” (i.e., supreme authority or empire). Stuart, Hosea-Jonah, p. 398, vocalizes the Hebrew (tA;kUs) as Succoth, a city on the east side of the Jordan Valley, from which “David successfully dominated (united) Israel’s neighbors to the east and south.” He argues that its “rebuilding would herald the return of Israel to power.” His argument is not convincing. G. F. Hasel refutes this last interpretation in *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Andrews University Monograph Series in Religion 5; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1972), p. 474.” W. Edward Glenny, “Gentiles and the People of God: A Study of Apostolic Hermeneutics and Theology in Acts 15” presented at 2006 ETS, available online, [www.ntresources.com/documents/Amos9inActs15b.pdf](http://www.ntresources.com/documents/Amos9inActs15b.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Glenny, 9.

<sup>16</sup> *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Accordance electronic ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 365.

<sup>17</sup> Peterson, David G. *The Acts of the Apostles*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; William B. Eerdmans, 2009). Citation from Logos Bible Software version, n.p.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Peterson, et al.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas E. McComiskey, *Amos* (EBC 7; ed. Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas; Accordance electronic ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), n.p.

<sup>20</sup> C. F. Keil and Delitzsch F., *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Accordance electronic ed. 10 vols.; Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), n.p.

our ordinary use of these concepts? Houses and tents differ in one chief aspect, one is permanent and the other is designed as movable. This was so in the Bible, just as today (e.g., the tabernacle in the wilderness, then set in place in Shiloh, then the shrine for the ark on Zion, then the fixed temple of Solomon, second temple, etc.). A dilapidated house does not become a tent.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the Tabernacle of Moses was a tent, but quite glorious with gold-covered wood and embroidered curtains, etc. Just because something is a tent does not mean that it is less glorious than a house, even less a dilapidated house.

Very few interpreters explore the significance of “tent” vs “house” (Gr. *skene* vs *oikos*), beneath the surface of this Amos 9/Acts 15. Amos refers to the “tent” (*sukkat*) of David (Amos 9:11), not to the “house” (*bayit*) of David. In Acts 15, the term is “tent” or “tabernacle” (*skene*), while the temple of Solomon is called a “house” (*oikos*, Acts 7:47). This distinction is very strong in the seminal passage of the Davidic covenant, 2 Samuel 7. In the LXX, David lives in a house (*oikos*) of cedar, but the Lord dwells in a “tent” (*skene*).

. . . the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains.” . . .<sup>11</sup> The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. <sup>12</sup> “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> “He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (2Sam. 7:2-13)

To summarize, David desires to build a “house” (LXX *oikos*) for the Lord, but the Lord responds that He will build a “house” (*oikos*) for David. If the Amos/Acts prophecy means that David’s “house” (dynasty, kingdom, etc) will be restored, to refer to it as a “tent” is contrary to the point of the Davidic covenant. Is there another possibility that makes better sense of the reference to David’s “tent”?

While it is directly addressed in the face in the Davidic covenant, very few current commentators see it. The “tent” in 2 Sam. 7 (and 2 Sam. 11:11) is the original place of worship containing the ark on Mount Zion. I could find only one commentator who makes this connection. Lenski identifies the tabernacle as the structure prior to Solomon’s temple. He argues that it cannot be the “house of David” or the royal line. “*Skene* is never employed in that sense. In Jesus, the risen and glorified, the throne and the kingdom or rule of David were raised up and established forever. That had been done years ago and was not being done now.”<sup>22</sup> Lenski is correct. The question of whether the throne and rule of David continues is not an issue. The very first sermon in Acts makes this point. “God had sworn to him [David] with an oath to seat one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ . . . Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear” (Acts 2:30-33).

<sup>21</sup> The argument proceeds sometimes by reference to 2 Sam. 11:11, Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters (*sukkot*, LXX: *skene*), and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house (*bayit*, LXX: *oikos*) to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing.” This seems to recall the contrast in 2 Sam. 7 (see below) which would serve as *subtle, but deep reproof to David*, i.e., now a non-Israelite (Uriah) has zeal for Yahweh’s army and sanctuary in comparison to his own comfort. It proves the difference between a temporary and permanent dwelling, not that a “house” conceptually becomes a “tent” after some dilapidation.

<sup>22</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1944), 609.

How does this “Tent/Tabernacle (*skene*) of David” (in Jerusalem prior to the temple) explain the prophetic fulfillment in Acts 15?<sup>23</sup> David brought the Ark into Jerusalem in the famous episode where he danced before the Lord (2 Sam. 6:14). This “Tabernacle” housed the Ark of the Covenant and was the location of David’s worship during his reign, prior to the construction of Solomon’s temple.<sup>24</sup>

David established this house of worship in Jerusalem in a specific place, the stronghold of Mount Zion. The other aspects of the Tabernacle of Moses resided in Gibeon. Mosaic sacrifices continued to be offered in Gibeon (2 Chr. 1:3). Janice E. Leonard observes about the worship at the Tabernacle of David, “Priests and Levites were sanctified to carry on worship before it, but except for the initial dedication ceremonies, this worship did not involve burnt offerings.”<sup>25</sup>

So they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tabernacle (LXX: *skenes*) that David had erected for it. Then they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God . . . And he appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the LORD God of Israel: Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, and Obed-edom: Jeiel with stringed instruments and harps, but Asaph made music with cymbals; Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests regularly blew the trumpets before the ark of the covenant of God. (1 Chr 16:1–6 NKJV)

Three important matters stand out about the Tabernacle of David in contrast to the previous Mosaic Tabernacle.

1) Unlike the Mosaic Tabernacle, the Ark was not hidden behind a veil or curtain. Worshipers were “before” the Ark which was in the “middle of the tent” (2 Sam. 6:17 NET, 1 Chr. 16:4). 2) Unlike the Mosaic Tabernacle, the worshipers included Gentiles along with Jews, namely Obed-Edom the Gittite (1 Chr. 16:5, 2Sam. 6:10). 3) Unlike the Mosaic Tabernacle in which there were no songs of praise, worship at the Davidic Tabernacle emphasized praise with musical instruments.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, this “kind of worship” substantially transfers sacrificial worship actions from the blood of bulls and goats to the fruit of lips which give thanks.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> I am indebted to Peter J. Leithart in his recorded lectures in the Christ Church Ministerial Conference, “The Other Day the Music Died” (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2000), also presented at the 2001 Biblical Horizons Conference ([www.WordMp3.com](http://www.WordMp3.com)). These ideas are more fully explicated in his, *From Silence to Song: The Davidic Liturgical Revolution* (Moscow ID: Canon, 2003).

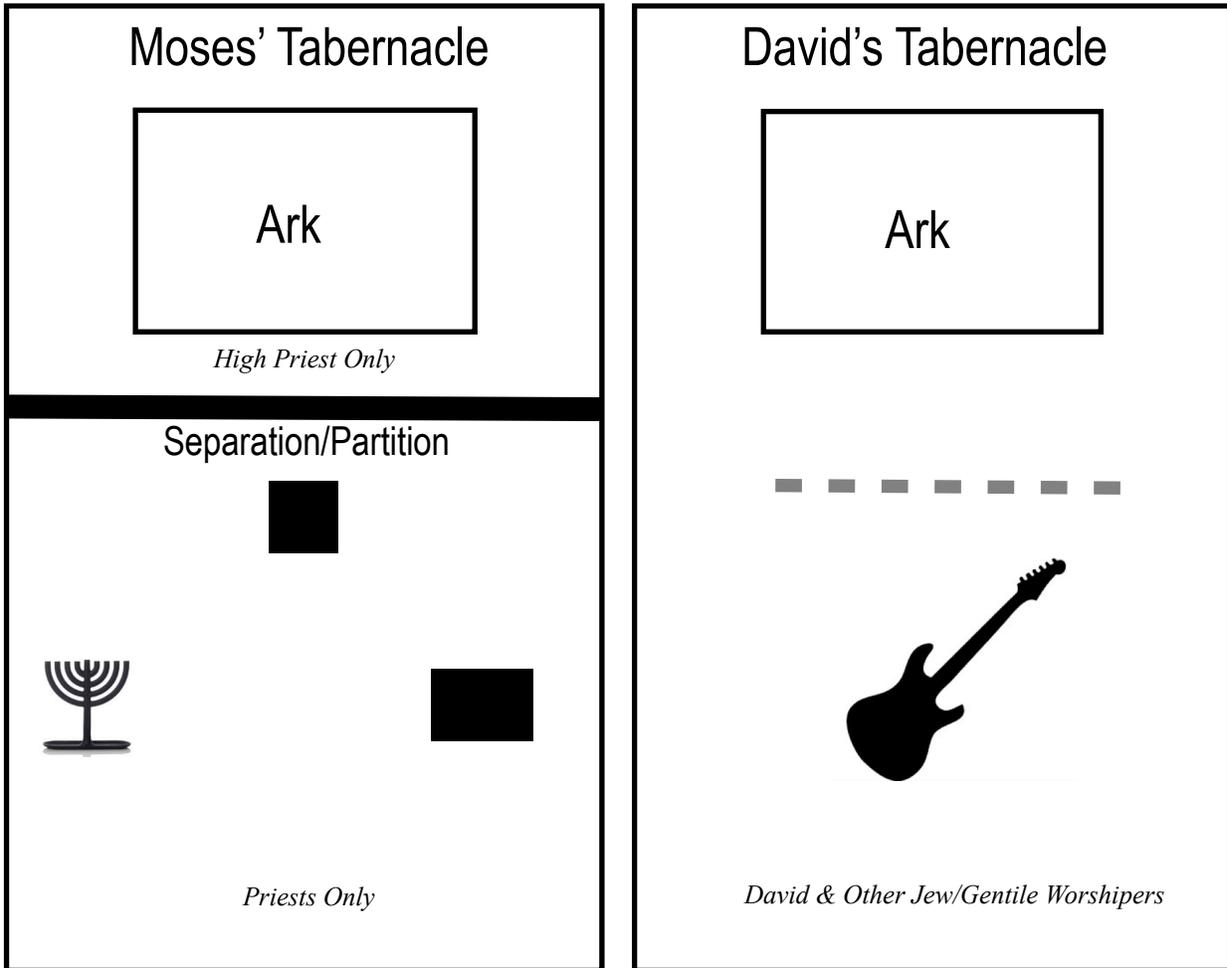
<sup>24</sup> In what follows, I am providing a revision of a portion of my chapter, “Musical Instruments” in *It Was Good: Making Music to the Glory of God*, ed. Ned Bustard (Lancaster PA: Square Halo, 2013). The purpose of this chapter was to examine the Church’s views of instruments. I argue that the biblical theology of the Tabernacle of David provides a compelling basis for using instruments in worship.

<sup>25</sup> This helpful article is found in, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship: The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*, Vol. 1, Robert Webber ed. (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 121. The idea that animal sacrifices ceased after the dedication is significant. It is drawn from the inference that there is no further instruction or appointment relating to this. Solomon, however, later offers sacrifices at this location after a significant dream (1 Kgs. 3:15). This implies that animal sacrifices were occasional or for special events, rather than routine.

<sup>26</sup> Prior to this the only use of instruments mentioned at the Mosaic Tabernacle was the two silver trumpets “for calling the congregation and for directing the movement of the camps” (Num. 10:1-10).

<sup>27</sup> This is explored in a helpful way by James B. Jordan and Peter J. Leithart in the 2001 Biblical Horizons Conference: The Levites and Music available here: <http://www.wordmp3.com/product-group.aspx?id=83>

Therefore, the Tabernacle of David provides the first example of direct access before the Lord in worship by multi-ethnic worshipers with instrumental, musical worship. It provides a foretaste of new covenant worship in which the temple veil has been torn apart so that all nations have equal access to worship the Lord (Matt. 27:51, Mk. 15:38, Lk. 23:45). This Tabernacle is prophetic of the new covenant in which the promise of God is for Jews and Gentiles to come into Christ as a New Man, a new Adam or “new humanity” (Eph. 2:15 NRSV).



It is surprising to discover Gentiles and Jews worshipping together before the Lord in the Old Covenant. But like men of Abraham’s household, Joseph’s Egyptian wife, Rahab, and Ruth, true Israel has always included covenantally converted Gentiles. Likewise, the musician Obed-Edom, was a “Philistine from Gath who apparently was loyal to David and Israel. At Obed-Edom’s house David left the ark of the covenant following the death of Uzzah at the hand of God (2 Sam. 6:6-11).”<sup>28</sup> Peter Leithart says, “Moreover, the blessings upon Obed-Edom reveal that the Davidic covenant will be a covenant of blessing to Gentile nations, a promise fulfilled especially in Solomon’s reign, when the nations came to learn wisdom from Israel’s king (1 Kings 10:24), but also seen earlier as many foreigners come to join David and become mighty

<sup>28</sup> “OBED-EDOM,” Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Eds Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville: Holman, 2003. Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc.

men (like Uriah the Hittite).”<sup>29</sup>

This example of worship might still lie undisturbed in the annals of Chronicles except for its veiled citation in the New Testament. As we have seen, the inclusion of Gentiles in the Church was the subject of the first Church council in Acts 15. When James cites Amos 9:11, it is precisely because of Gentile inclusion in the Church. By “rebuilding” this Tabernacle there will be equal access of Jews and Gentiles to God through Christ. Jews and (uncircumcised) Gentiles will now assemble together in the name of Jesus to worship the true God.

Therefore, this “tent” is not the Davidic “house” or “dynasty,” though the Davidic covenant is somewhat related. It is great David’s “greater son” that is the focal point. *The Tabernacle of David is not the place in which David was exalted, but the place where he exalted Yahweh.* It is not the “rule of David” over the Gentiles, but the worship of Yahweh by the Gentiles in a fulfilled type of Zion’s worship. This seems especially relevant to the expanding Church in Acts 15. The Gentile connection is strong evidence that James and Amos understood their inclusion in the distinctly Davidic worship on Mount Zion.

The connection is called in prophetic short-hand, “David’s Tent/Tabernacle.” David’s “house” and dynasty was indeed built and culminated in the seating of Jesus at the right hand of God (Ps. 2, Ps. 110, Acts 2, et al). But what most qualified David for a kingly, covenant promise was not his military power, but that he worshiped the Covenant Lord, Yahweh.<sup>30</sup> Indeed his being a “man of war” with bloody hands disqualified him for building the temple (1 Chr. 28:3). It was this same shepherd boy who worshiped on the verdant hills while protecting sheep. It was this young man that said with sling in hand, “the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD’S” (1 Sam. 17:47). What a contradiction to the “man after God’s own heart” to think the major fulfillment of David’s Tent is in a military state of Israel in the millennium!

David’s most distinguished achievement is his worship. He called all nations to join the chorus. David’s psalm of dedication for this Tabernacle on Mount Zion emphasizes Gentile worship, “Sing to the LORD, all the earth . . . Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples . . . And let them say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns.’” (1 Chr 16:23–24, 31, also Psalm 105). David’s Psalms emphasize Gentiles worshipping Yahweh. “Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the Gentiles, And sing praises to Your name” (Psalm 18:49). “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You” (Psalm 22:27). The bold Messianic Psalm 2 says, “Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion . . . Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance” (Ps. 2:6-8). Therefore, the Davidic worship at Zion becomes a synecdoche with all nations worshipping Yahweh.

In an ode to Zion the sons of Korah wrote, “The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!” (Ps. 87:2-3). This Psalm

---

<sup>29</sup> “Death and Resurrection of the Tabernacle” (Biblical 53 Horizons, February, 1999) [www.BiblicalHorizons.com](http://www.BiblicalHorizons.com).

<sup>30</sup> A beautiful example of this is in David’s response to the very covenant of 2 Samuel 7:18ff: “Then David the king went in and sat before the LORD, and he said, “Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far? 19 And yet this was insignificant in Your eyes, O Lord GOD, for You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future. . . 22 For this reason You are great, O Lord GOD; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. . .”

about Zion explicitly refers to the inclusion of other nations in the register of Zion. "I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to those who know Me; Behold, O Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia: 'This one was born there.' And of Zion it will be said, 'This one and that one were born in her; And the Most High Himself shall establish her'" (vv4-5). Commentator, Derek Kidner explains, "A representative sample of the Gentile world is being enrolled in God's city . . . Towards the people of God they are not mere proselytes: they can avow, as Paul said of his Roman status, 'But I was born a citizen' (cf. Acts 22:28). This is the gospel age, no less."<sup>31</sup>

Isaiah 16:5 uses Zion's Tabernacle as the very place of Christ's reign over all the world, "In mercy the throne will be established; And One will sit on it in truth, in the Tabernacle of David" (Heb: ohel; LXX: *skene*). Using the literalist, dispensational hermeneutic, are we to think Jesus will reign from an actual "tent" in Zion in the millennium? Rather, this reign calls to mind the new covenant-like worship of Jew and Gentile together in the Church.

Even more striking is the fact that while we popularly associate Mount Zion with going up to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, *neither* Solomon's temple *nor* the later temple of Zerubbabel and its expansion by Herod were built *on Mount Zion*. The temple was built on Mount Moriah. "Now Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah..." (2 Chr 3:1). In fact, after the temple was constructed they removed the Ark from Mount Zion and brought it to the temple on Mount Moriah (2 Chr 5:2). A striking truth now presents itself: the only worship that ever actually happened on Mount Zion was at the Tabernacle of David.<sup>32</sup>

The biblical theology of the concept of Zion is a stairway to heaven. While this Tabernacle is the place of the first and only worship on this mount, Zion truly becomes an icon of heaven's worship. The Tabernacle of David is the origin.<sup>33</sup> Hence, the concept of Zion is a significant ecclesiological theme in the New Testament. Hebrews 12 contrasts two mountains, urging believers to view their identity with Mount Zion. "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven. . ." (Heb. 12:22).<sup>34</sup> In a similar typology, Paul contrasts the Jerusalem above with Jerusalem below (Gal. 4:25-26). In the triumph of the Lamb in Revelation 14 and 15, John brings together Zion, musical instruments, and all nations. He sees "a Lamb standing *on Mount Zion*, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand" who "were redeemed from the earth" with "the sound of

---

<sup>31</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC 16; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 346.

<sup>32</sup> David's place of worship was this place, not the later temple built by Solomon and not the Mosaic Tabernacle located in Gibeon. So in the Psalms when we read that David longed to be at the House of the Lord or meditated on the beauty of God in His temple, he was referring to this Tabernacle (of David) (Ps. 5:7, 11:4, 18:6, etc). Psalm 27 says "One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple" (Psalm 27:4). When David was beholding the beauty of the Lord, he was doing so in praise, seeing the Ark at the place known to us as the Tabernacle of David.

<sup>33</sup> Some might argue that Zion simply becomes another name for Jerusalem. This may be so for some texts, but there is a clear origin of this iconic location.

<sup>34</sup> The other mountain is unnamed, but described as "the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet" (Heb. 12:18-19). Mount Sinai was the place of the giving of the law and certainly fits the description. But perhaps the reason Mount Sinai is not named is because there is a more subtle contrast with the standing temple in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah. Throughout Hebrews the appeal is made toward those tempted to return to old covenant forms (without Christ), rather than persevering with the new covenant assemblies of Christ. It is not that they would literally return to Mount Sinai, rather they may actually return to Mount Moriah, the temple in Jerusalem, forsaking the new covenant Church (Heb. 10:28).

harpists playing their harps” and “they sang as it were a new song before the throne” (Rev. 14:1-3 emphasis mine). In chapter 15 with “harps of God,” they sing, “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! . . . For all nations shall come and worship before You . . .” (Rev. 15:2-4, emphasis mine).

### **Conclusion**

The dispensational reading of Acts 15 and the Tabernacle of David not only misses the basic reason for its citation in the first place (the original inclusion of Gentiles), but the rich biblical theology which culminates in the worship of Jesus by the nations. Making the connections to the original worship on Mount Zion is foundational for new covenant ecclesiology, since right worship is critical to any conception of a biblical Church. Moreover, this biblical theology of Zion’s worship is instructive in several ways: missiologically, liturgically, and eschatologically.

Oddly, Scofield was right; this is one of the most important passages in the NT for the future. But the future is not a “mongrel kingdom” of Israelitish military power in which blood sacrifices are offered in a temple in Jerusalem with a Messiah ruling with an iron rod fist.<sup>35</sup> The future is the current and increasing worship of Jesus at Mount Zion above, as all the nations exalt the risen Christ with the “sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name” (Heb. 13:15).

*Jesus shall reign where'er the sun;  
Does his successive journeys run;  
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,  
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.*

*People and realms of every tongue;  
Dwell on His love with sweetest song;  
And infant voices shall proclaim;  
Their early blessings on His Name.*<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> This phrase is from Lorraine Boettner, “During the Millennium the saints in glorified bodies mingle freely with men who still are in the flesh. This latter element in particular seems to us to present an inconsistency,— a mongrel kingdom, the new earth and glorified sinless humanity mingling with the old earth and sinful humanity, Christ and the saints in immortal resurrection bodies living in a world that still contains much of sin and amid scenes of death and decay.” *The Millennium* (Philipsburg NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1957), see ch. 4 available online, [http://www.worldwithoutend.info/bbc/books/millennium-lb/pt\\_01/0104.htm](http://www.worldwithoutend.info/bbc/books/millennium-lb/pt_01/0104.htm)

<sup>36</sup> Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David*, 1719.