



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

The Divine Purpose

The Nature of the Present Age 1: The Viewpoint of James – I TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks again for the Scriptures and for the way in which they have preserved for us the ministry, the life and ministry of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And we thank Thee for the way in which the Holy Spirit uses them in our lives. We give Thee thanks for the forgiveness of sin, which has come to us through Christ's saving work. We thank Thee for his presence with us. We thank Thee for that Thou study and we ask again for divine enablement as we read and ponder the things of the Word of God. We give Thee thanks for the plan of the ages and for all of the revelation in Holy Scripture concerning it. Enable us to think clearly and profitably and enable us through the knowledge that we gain from the study of the Word of God to be more fruitful and effective representatives of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee again for this hour. We ask God's blessing upon us now.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

[Message] Now, for those of you who were here in our last study, which was about a month ago, you will remember, I hope, that we were looking at Acts Chapter 15 and the citation from Amos 9. And we were making the comment that we were looking in our next few studies at James' view of the present age as found here. And then we will

look at Paul's view of the present age from Romans 11 and Ephesians 2. And we would also look at the view of the present age of one of the other New Testament authors. But when I finished the last study, it was obvious that to me that I'd had to go so rapidly that I had lost a number of you and that was confirmed by the fact that some of the better students came up to me afterwards and said, "Well, you really lost me tonight," or "I'm totally confused about it," or something along the same lines. So I thought that in order to remedy the confusion (and I hope you will come back the next two times), we're going to take three times on this particular problem, the study of James' view of the present age and specifically Acts Chapter 15 and the citation from Amos 9, Verses 11 and 12, which is right at the heart of the question.

So our subject tonight again, is the nature of the present age from the viewpoint of James. And this is the 22nd I believe, of our studies in our study of the ages and the covenant and the nations. We have -- I have asked the tape room to destroy the other tapes so it's lost forever and therefore you will not have proof that I have ever done anything but perfectly, collusively clear in everything that I have said. [Laughter] You've got a copy? Your life is in danger. [Laughter]

So tonight we are going to begin our study, and we will take a look at only the opening part of our study. We will look at the introduction and the New Testament context of James' citation, and if we have time, I hope maybe we will, we'll look at the Old Testament context of the citation, and we'll save some of the other aspects of it for our studies afterwards.

Now, it so happens I'm beginning to write a little paper on this in the light of the fact that we're dealing with it in some detail. So I hope you'll pardon me tonight if I follow very closely what I have been writing on my computer. If you look up at the right hand and see the name of the file. It's Amos Acts 15. Let me begin with a few words by way of introduction. The famous citation by James of Amos Chapter 9, Verse 11 and 12 in Acts 15 has become important in the history of biblical interpretation -- perhaps I should

say evangelical biblical interpretation, as all students of ecclesiology and eschatology know. It's a significant passage for several reasons, but the least of which is that people think it's important simply because so often, although they have no idea why, they've heard it's important. You will find, for example, in the Scofield Reference Bible, the statement that this is important. In fact, in some of the older editions, I didn't look at the new editions, it has been called the most important of all the sections that have to do with dispensational theology, but I say that not to be funny but because the passages are very difficult ones to grasp in a clear way but onto some more substantial reasons for its importance.

First of all, it's the occasion of the settling of the question of whether Gentiles could be saved as Gentiles. Now, there was no question about whether Gentiles could be saved. That was a well-known teaching, a well-known fact of Old Testament revelation, and there really was no question about whether Gentiles could be saved. The question was: could they be saved as Gentiles? That is were they able to enter into all of the benefits of evangelical salvation and not by necessity submit themselves to the law, to be circumcised if they were male and to observe the Law of Moses. Submission to the right of circumcision is found unnecessary, of course, in Acts Chapter 15 as a result of the meeting of the church at Antioch with the church at Jerusalem. And of course, verse 11 is the verse in which Peter states that the conclusion of their debate is that we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we are saved in the same manner as they too. So it's the occasion of the settling of the question of whether Gentiles could be saved as Gentiles, and Peter gives us the important statement in verse 11. This passage is also important, secondly, for the light it throws on James' conception of the present age and for its provision for a basis for comparing his view with Paul. And we will, as we go on in our studies, take a look at the relationship between the two. I think I will be able to show that James and Paul have the same conception of the present age, but we'll wait our studies all at point.

Thirdly, it's one of the major passages in the controversy over amillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, and historical premillennialism. It's therefore not surprising that many evangelical articles have been written on the problems of Acts 15 and the quotation from Amos Chapter 9, Verse 11 and 12. The late Eric Fowler, the German director of the Bible school at Degenest in West Germany, in one of his books contended that whenever the question of Davidic kingship was raised three issues always came to the fore. The time of the kingdom's commencement -- now, of course, the reason for that is that there are some who think of the Davidic kingdom as having only a future inception and others believed that the Davidic kingdom had its inauguration with the ratification of that covenant and the blood that our Lord shed on Calvary's cross. So that is one of the questions that arises. Has the Davidic covenant at the present time been ratified and therefore, is it now enforced though the Lord Jesus is at the right hand of the Father?

The second question, Mr. Fowler said, was the form of the rule. That is, whether inward and spiritual, as he put it, or outward and political spiritual. In other words, is the Davidic kingdom solely a kingdom of the inner spirit, or does it also touch the political life of this world.

And the third question he said was the extent of the kingdom. That is, whether it's over the church, the spiritual body, or over national Israel and other lands and people's political bodies as well as spiritual bodies in the sense that all who ultimately are in that kingdom will have some conception of spiritual truth. Well, we want to consider the passage and the citation now, and we want to look at the New Testament context first. I think we can go over this fairly rapidly because we've already given a brief survey of it. Some of you heard me preach on Acts Chapter 15 more than once perhaps and then finally I want to offer a hermeneutical and exegetical analysis of the text as it relates to the theological questions mentioned a moment ago. So we come in our outline to Roman I the New Testament context of James' citation of Amos and capital A, the debate

and speech of Peter Acts Chapter 15, Verse 1 through Verse 11. So if you have Bible, will you turn to Acts Chapter 15. I think you'll follow along a little better in the things that I'm saying.

One of the things that Luke writes about immediately in the first two verses of Acts Chapter 15 is the dissent that took place at Antioch. The general context of the passage is that of the council of Jerusalem so called which took place about 49 A.D. That was not an ecumenical meeting. It was simply a consultation so far as we can tell between Antioch and Jerusalem. We should not think of it, for example, as the Baptist convention or the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church or some kind of meeting like that in which numbers of churches send delegates and they discuss various questions. This was a question. It was discussed but apparently discussed simply by the church at Antioch, which had been troubled over the question, and the church at Jerusalem.

The consultation involved the principle of grace and salvation as the apostle writes in the epistle to the Galatians. That question is one of the great questions of Pauline theology. Paul and his company after their first ambassadorial journey had returned to Antioch, which was the mother church of Gentile Christianity. They found as one commentator put it the snake that crawled into Eden. The way of salvation for Gentiles had become an issue. And Luke writes, and some having come down from Judea, began to teach the brethren that except you be circumcised by the custom of Moses, or by an accordance with the Law of Moses, or the custom of Moses, you are unable able to be saved. And when there had come to be debate and discussion, not a little, (I like that expression), not a little, as he said *uke alega*.

With Paul and Barnabas they gave commandment to them to go up or they charged them -- charged Paul and Barnabas to go up and certain others of them to the apostles and elders unto Jerusalem concerning this question. We might have thought that Cornelius' salvation had settled the matter because just a few chapters before when the Apostle Peter preached in Cornelius' house, there the Gentiles were converted.

Remarkably the Holy Spirit fell upon them as Peter was preaching, and one would have thought that settled the question of Gentile salvation, but the great emphasis of Acts chapter 10 was on the fact of Gentile salvation. If you remember, Peter objected at first to going to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and so God shows him in a supernatural that he was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and so he went. The method of their salvation has now become the issue. It seems that the church must always fight the battle of grace in human approach to God. It seems to me that that question is really at the heart of much of our church life today. Do we really believe in salvation by grace? And that term “grace” encompasses the kind of freedom that excludes all kinds of human activity including freewill if we are to understand grace in its true freedom. Can the Gentiles be saved as Gentiles? That’s what the matter came to. Must Gentiles be circumcised in the present age to join the covenant community or the church?

Well, after much debate and dissention, Paul, Barnabas and some others were appointed to journey to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders there. It’s a tribute to the judgment of the men that they didn’t hasten to conclusion and condemn Jerusalem. They had a good reason to do so. The men who had come and who were upsetting things in Antioch were from Jerusalem. Well, they might well have gotten very angry at Jerusalem and made a point over that been very critical of them but as you can see from the context here, they did not blame Jerusalem for it until they’d had an opportunity to talk to them. I consider that, myself at least, a tribute to the judgment of the men that didn’t hasten to that kind of conclusion. They felt that discussion was necessary. I don’t think they felt negotiations were necessary, but I think they felt discussion was necessary. Today the great word is negotiate. So we have a little bit of grace and a little bit of law. It wasn’t that kind of thing but it was discussion and the resulting debate has been called one of the ten decisive battles of Christianity. So it’s important.

Now, the journey to Jerusalem is described in Verse 3 through Verse 5. The journey to headquarters was a joyful one. It was an occasion for Paul and Barnabas and the others with them to discuss the things that have been happening among the Gentiles there in Antioch and in its environs. “So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, relating the conversion of the Gentiles; and they causing literally -- they were making great joy to all the brethren. And having come to Jerusalem they were received of the church and the apostles and elders. And they reported how many things God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed rose up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the Law of Moses.” So in spite of the fact that there had been great rejoicing through Phoenicia and Samaria when they arrived at Jerusalem, things were a bit different. The believing Pharisees and wholly or loosely stress upon the fact that they had believed. He uses the perfect participle to describe this. They had believed. So they were unhappy over the apparent neglect of the law among the Gentile converts, and they demanded that Gentiles observe the rite of circumcision and keep the law.

So Luke now describes the public meeting and Peter’s message in Verse 6 through Verse 11. A public meeting there is by the way if you study this account very closely there are -- there is another construction of these meetings possible, but you can tell the way I’m taking them and there isn’t anything that I know of that hinges upon the way in which you understand these meetings so we’ll not say anything about it. So the public meeting with the apostles and the elders and places of oversight took place. There was again a great deal of debate. That, by the way, will let you know the kind of meetings that they had in the early church. They had meetings in which it was possible for individuals to rise and debate questions. So finally, after much debate, Peter arose and delivered the address that settled the issue. He said,

“We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we are saved in the same manner as they also are.”

Now, I mentioned I think in the last time that that's a rather strange way to put it. Spurgeon, in one of his sermons, lays great stress on that. In fact, the sermon on this particular text in Verse 11, he says you wouldn't expect them to do that. You would expect them to turn it around. And say we believe that they are saved in the same way that we are, but he turned it around and said we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus we are saved in the same way or manner as they also are as if to suggest, Mr. Spurgeon thinks, I don't there's proof of this but at least it suggests that anybody who has raised the question of whether circumcision is necessary to be saved doesn't quite understand yet the gospel, and, therefore, that's why he puts it this way. This may reflect something that even Peter was thinking about.

Well, it was a magnificent statement perhaps more deserving of the title The Apostles Creed than the famous at best second century creed that we know of as the Apostle's Creed. That creed was unknown to the apostles, but it goes by that title among us. Personally, I think there's some reason for calling this the Apostle's Creed. Well, of course, you know the historical background. So we're not going to debate a point like that. Let's turn now to the speech of James, Verses 12 through 18 and Verse 12 is something of a prelude of it. Following the speech of Peter, “Then all the multitude kept silent...”

Now, I want you to know notice that that is probably the way that that verb should be rendered. If you looked it up in a dictionary, you might find that this word can be rendered while silent or in certain circumstances became silent.

Now, if you render it became silent you are taking a certain view of the tense that is used here. It's an eres tense and in the light of the fact that they have not been silent and now in Verse 12 we read that they are silent it's clear that they became silent. So we

would call this dramatically an ingressive error. That is it expresses there the fact that they at this point became silent. I don't want to make too much over that, but I think that's clearly the rendering at this particular point, and all the multitude became silent. They had not been silent but now they are silent, and then the verb that follows is a verb that probably refers to inceptive action, and they begin to listen to Barnabas and Paul as they related how many signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. So the multitude fell silent, and they began to listen to Barnabas and Paul as they told about those marvelous things that had happened among the Gentiles by their preaching.

The tone of the meeting, it seems to me, has changed. We have had debate and discussion, now silence, now Barnabas and Paul related the things that have happened and the tenor disposition has undergone a change.

Well, after the prelude of Verse 12, James rises and in Verse 13 and Verse 14 we have what I've called the historical connection or the citation itself. I have one outline in one hand and another outline in the other. So you'll understand if I make a slight change. So James rose at this point and he said,

“Brethren, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. "With this the words of the Prophets agree”

Notice the plural. Later on we'll have a little something to say about that. “The prophets agree, just as it is written” That is the New American Standard Bible rendering, and it's essentially correct. The New International Version has this,

“Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:” (Verses 13 through 15)

Now, there's several things that I want you to note at this point. First of all, James, contrary to Peter, resorts to Scripture. I don't whether you notice that or not, but Peter's argument was an argument from happened in Cornelius's house. Some commentators think that Peter's argument is the stronger argument because it's the argument about what God has done acknowledged by all. In fact, it is called Peter's superior argument from what God has done in the matter in question. James' argument is from Holy Scripture, but of course, it represents his interpretation of Holy Scripture. So that's one thing we want to notice right at the beginning. James appeals to Scripture. Well, secondly, another thing I want you to notice is that -- I think this is true of most people who read this section, when you read James' statement from Amos Chapter 9, Verses 11 and 12, you get the impression that it doesn't seem to bear on the point at issue. In other words, the point at issue is not Gentile salvation.

Now, you, of course, can see from James' quotation that it does have to do with Gentile salvation, but the point at issue is not Gentile salvation. The point at issue is Gentile salvation as Gentiles. You rather expect something that has to do with circumcision or something that has to do with grace that might imply that circumcision as a requirement turned to grace into work or something like that.

Now, that, I think, is a general feeling of all those guests because it's really the reason why there's a great deal of debate over this use of Scripture and even those who stand on different sides of the question acknowledge that they have to do a great deal of study to come at what they think is the proper understanding of James' use of this passage from the Old Testament. In fact, of course, the Old Testament doesn't contain the idea -- contain the idea of an elect body of Jew and Gentiles on an equality. The

situation that now exists in the church. That’s Paul’s point in Ephesians Chapter 3, Colossians Chapter 1. That’s often misunderstood incidentally. Let me anticipate what we will say later on when we look at those passages in Ephesians 2 and 3 and Colossians 1. It’s often thought that when Paul talks about the mystery of the secret that he’s talking about the church. He’s not talking about the church. The church is not a mystery. What is the mystery is the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the church or in the people of God, this relationship of equality. You can search the Old Testament through and I don’t think you will find any place in which it is stated that in the future there will be a time when Jew and Gentiles stand on an equality in the people of God.

Now, as divine revelation unfolds as house kacheista develops then one faces this question. The apostle, of course is called as the minister of the gospel to the Gentiles, and he talks about the fact that the mystery has been committed to him. Incidentally, we’re not talking about anything that’s ultra dispensational or dispensational when we say that. This is something that anyone studying the New Testament will have to come to the conclusion about, but that specific relationship between Jew and Gentile in the church or in the people of God or in the one body is one of equality. How does the Amos situation -- citation then indicate this? How does it say that God will take out of the Gentiles a people for his name? Unless significantly not only does James seem to omit discussion of how Gentiles are saved, but his citation appears to say that Gentiles are to be saved independent upon Israel’s salvation as you read through the remainder of verses here in the New Testament, Verses 16 and 17 you get the impression that the Gentiles who are to be saved are saved independent upon the salvation of Israel represented by the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David. Well, we’ll talk about these things. So we’re not trying to settle those questions now just causing you to think about them.

There are a few points to note here before we go on in comparison of the context and texts of James and Amos. First of all, I’d like for you to notice the expression in Verse 14. Simeon, James says, has related. That’s our word from which we get exegesis,

exegeisthai. Simeon has declared how God proton. Notice the adverb that means first, at first, at the first. Now, that word, I think, is important. The Authorized Version renders it at the first. The New International Version renders it at first. The New American Standard Bible is even briefer. It says simply first.

Now, it's clear from the context that the first refers to Peter's preaching in Acts Chapter 10. Simeon has declared because you see in verse 7 Peter mentioned that. He said God made choice by him that Gentiles should hear the word from him. So James says, Simeon has related how at the first or first. God visited and perhaps we should render that was concerned but visited then we surprise Gentiles. That's the sense of it. Visited Gentiles to take from Gentiles a people for his name. So further then is a reference to Peter's preaching in Cornelius' house. So that's God's first visitation of the Gentiles as Gentiles.

Now, Gentiles have been saved before this, but this is Gentiles as Gentiles. That is as the Gentile nation. Keep those things in mind. The New Testament talks not simply an individual Gentile but talks about Gentile nation. It not only talks about an Israelite as an individual but it talks about the nation Israel. You see that in Romans 11 where Paul talks about the interplay of Gentiles and the nation Israel.

Now, let's look at the second expression in Verse 14. He says he, “visited the Gentiles to take from Gentiles a people for His name.” As you were looking at the Greek text you would notice that the expression from Gentiles a people is the order that Peter uses. Whenever you have a little phrase like this thrown forward, there is a slight bit of emphasis upon it. So to take from Gentile that's the only way I can say that in English from Gentile a people for his name. So literally it's simply from Gentile people.

Now, that's significant for a couple of reasons. First of all, the emphatic position of the word, as I mentioned, stresses the new departure that now occurs. It's from Gentiles that a people for his name is being taken but as a second thing -- note about is perhaps more important. It's the word that James uses for his people.

Now, if you read the Greek Old Testament and incidentally his citation that follows comes -- well, if you had to decide between the masaratic text or the Greek text you would maceratic Hebrew text or the Greek text, you say it's more like the Septigent text. The term that he uses, the term *laos* for people -- in this case *ex ethno laom* is the term that was used for the people of God in the Old Testament. That is for the nation Israel in the Septuagint version. So the use of the term people for Gentiles is striking. As I say, that's the word the Greek Old Testament uses of Israel as God's people separated from the Gentiles. So here we are told by James God has at the first or first visited the Gentiles then he told us about it to take from Gentiles a people for his name.

Now, you can see right here that Peter and James. I assume Peter is in harmony with James. They believe that Gentile salvation as seen in Cornelius' house and now developing is a salvation that places the Gentiles within membership in the people of God, the people of God. The implication is plain. Gentiles share in Israel's covenantal blessings and status now. I think that's very important because right there we are told essentially what Paul says in Romans 11 when he says, the unnatural branches are grafted into the olive tree and partake of the root and the fatness of the olive tree. The natural branches largely broke off except for the remnant. The unnatural branches grafted in and specifically partake of the fat root of the olive tree.

Now, I think essentially James is saying the same thing. He's saying Gentiles form part of the people of God. A final point, I want you to notice the word taking out. God has visited the Gentiles to take out of the people from the Gentiles, take out the people from the Gentiles that's properly a reference, as I say, to what Paul sets forth in Romans Chapter 11. James affirms that his day and ours is the time for salvation of the fullness of the Gentiles.

Now, let me be careful at this point to make this point clearly so you won't leave and say I'm terribly confused. When we say the fullness of the Gentiles, we don't mean all of the Gentiles. We don't mean the Gentiles as a whole. We mean it in the sense that

Paul uses in Romans 11. Paul uses the term the fullness of the Gentiles, but he speaks of the fullness of the Gentiles entering in.

Now, the fullness of the Gentiles is that body of Gentiles determined by God to enter the body of Christ in the present age, but as Paul himself says in Romans Chapter 11, Verses 11 through 15 he says the salvation of the Gentiles is the occasion of provocation of Israel to jealousy whereby they shall now in their cutoff state shall come back into relationship to God and the result of that will be worldwide blessing among Gentiles. So you can see there are there is salvation of Gentiles at two times: first, before the coming of the Lord, the present age, and following the salvation of Israel.

Now, here when he says he's visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name, that's a selective process, to take out of them a people for his name. I suggest. I cannot prove that. I think if we looked at all of these things together, you'd finally come to me. It may take you two or three years to do it of course, but you'd come and say well listen I think maybe you're right about that. But anyway, I think at this point I'm right in saying that when he says take out of them a people for his name he's talking about what Paul talks about when he says blindness in part has happened to Israel and from the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so he goes on to say all Israel shall be saved. So he affirms then that his day is the time for the salvation of the full number of the Gentiles marked out for membership in the people of God but like Paul he sees the salvation of all the elect Gentiles as a future matter.

Now, let's take a look at the citation itself in Verses 11 and 12. I hope you're enjoying this. I enjoy this because I've had such a good time the last three days. Do you know last night I awakened at about -- I went to bed a little early for me. I think it was 12:30, and about 4:30 this morning I awakened and I couldn't go back to sleep. I was thinking about James and his statement and the quotation from Amos Chapter 9. That kept me awake for about forty-five minutes again. I've already spent the last three days on the point and to tell you the truth I've spent about two days on it when I went up to

Grace Seminary to lecture up there because when I went up there I have a schedule of lectures that I'd marked out for them, and I'd already given them the syllabus with every one of them and when I looked at my notes and went through them the first week I took up half of them because I didn't want to carry all those lectures. It's kind of heavy and then the next week I took the next half and I forgot that I'd been studying this quotation down here in Dallas and left my notes down here and I had two days to prepare a new lecture from my memory. So I spent two days in the library up there trying to recover my memory of what I had been talking about and decided that wasn't exactly what I wanted anyway. So I've been enjoying studying this passage. I'm sorry that I have to study some other things the rest of this week because I'd like to keep on doing it.

But now let's turn to the citation itself, Amos 9, 11, and 12. It's Verse 15 through Verse 18 in our section here in Acts Chapter 15. The quotation itself in Verses 16 and 17. In a rather loose way, James introduces an Old Testament passage in support of the preceding arguments. You'll notice he says in Verse 15,

“And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:”

Now, if we were looking at this exegetically and we saw this expression, and to this, in Greek exegesis one of principle hermeneutical and exegetical rule you have to keep constantly before you is that normally a pronoun refers to the nearest possible antecedent. That's just plain safe. That's clear speaking, clear speech. If you have if you use pronouns and you refer to something that you said four or five sentences ago, you're going to have people saying wait a minute, wait a minute, what are you talking about. So one of the basic rules of communication is that pronouns must refer to the nearest possible antecedent. You'll find in many languages that that's specifically set up as one of the rules that we are to keep before us when we study pronouns. They refer to the nearest possible antecedent.

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Now, mind you, there are exceptions and so you will have some exceptions and therefore, you cannot say it always has to be that, but if you don't have that as a general principle, then you will have a difficult time communicating. So now, when James says, “and to this the words of the prophets agree” what's the nearest antecedent? Well, in the very preceding verse he has said,

“Simon has declared how God first was concerned to take from the Gentiles the people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree...”

So the nearest possible antecedent is the action of God in taking out of the Gentiles a people for his name. So that's likely the antecedent of the this. It's the nearer antecedent, and it satisfies the requirements of the context. Ultimately, of course, there is no relationship to Peter's preaching to the Gentiles which he refers to in verse 7. Scholars debate the meaning of the word “agree.”

For example, scholars are careful to point out, or I think they are careful to point out, James doesn't say “fulfilled.” He doesn't say the sign is fulfilled they like to say. Rather, he says simply “the words of the prophets agree” with them. Now to my mind, in this context, that does not command a great deal of credibility. Sometimes you can say something is fulfilled in even stronger language than fulfilled. For example, when Peter was preaching on the day of Pentecost, and you remember that he is getting ready to introduce the passage from Joel in order to explain what is happening on Pentecost, he begins Verse 16 by saying in Acts Chapter 2,

“but this is not spoken through the prophet Joel.”

I have some good friends, I don't know whether they still hold this or not, but I think they do, it's written in their books. They like to say this text is not fulfilled here for

the simple reason that James doesn't -- that Peter doesn't say 'fulfilled'. He says simply, “this is that.” Well to my mind, to say “this is that” is even stronger than fulfilled. How could you say it any stronger than to say “this is that”? Because if you say this fulfills that then as everyone who has studied the use of the Old Testament and the New Testament knows, fulfilled is used in a number of senses; fulfilled typically, fulfilled analogically, fulfilled predictably, fulfilled indirectly and predictably and various types of fulfillment of that form. So if you'll use the introductory formula and you'll quickly come to that conclusion I think. So James says “agree,” but as far as I can see, it clearly means that James finds his intended fit in this passage from Amos Chapter 9.

It may be noted that James, while plainly citing from Amos 9, 11, and 12 still introduces the quote as in harmony with the words of the prophets, plural. The words of the prophets. That raises a question of where in the Old Testament is the present casting off of Israel, the subject. Well, I think if Paul were here, he would rise up and say, “Let me speak to that point, Lewis. Sit down for a while.” and everybody would be happy over there I'm sure. And he would say, “I dealt with that question in the Epistle to the Romans and pointed out that in Deuteronomy Chapter 32 in Verse 21, there I cited the text that said that God was going to make Israel jealous.” In the great Mosaic psalm of Deuteronomy 32, one of the really important passages of Old Testament prophecy. Perhaps Hosea Chapter 1 and 2 and the use that Paul makes of that in Chapter nine is involved in this as well.

Well, we have a few moments so let's begin the Old Testament context of the citation because sometimes in studying the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament, we spend all our time on the New Testament and forget that the real clues to seeing how the writer of Scripture handles Scripture is often found right in the Old Testament. So we turn to Amos Chapter 9, Verse 7 through Verse 10.

And this in the outline, I want to say a word about capital A, the preceding context Verses 7 through 10. Now in Verse 7 through the first part of Verse 8, Amos will

talk about Israel and the nations. Amos lived in the age of the greatest Hebrew prophets, called by a few of the Old Testament, the Golden Age of Hebrew prophecy. In Israel, there were Amos and Hosea. In Judah, Isaiah and Micah. Wouldn't it have been great to have lived in the day of these prophets? Amos, the intelligent, rustic. Hosea, the prophet of unconditional love. I think I would have been a great admirer of Hosea. Isaiah, that majestic, magnificent, perhaps greatest of all the prophets. And Micah, the one who understood so plainly the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant. Winds up his whole prophecy with that marvelous little last three verses of Micah Chapter 7.

Of special interest to us is the similarity of Amos' society to ours. I think of all the prophets that come to my mind immediately, one who would have a message apropos the United States of America would be Amos. His age was characterized by affluence, exploitation, and religion. When you look at those passages that he writes about, you'll see all of these things. The authorities were individuals who were bribing, making money from bribing. I imagine they could give some of our Wall Street men a few lessons in how to extort money from people. And our Wall Street experts are quite expert in that as *The Wall Street Journal* would tell you right at the present time. They exploited the people. They were rich. And they did it under the cover of religion. They had legal rackets, property rackets, and incidentally legal rackets are referred to too. And in our litigious society, Amos also would have felt right at home but not at home in the sense that he wanted to make the most of it, but it was right at home for a preacher who wanted to condemn what often goes on. And then of course, the sacrifices that were being offered and the things that characterized that is simply pretense. Need we say more? To his people, he was called an untutored but prepared, equipped, disciplined and enabled shepherd of God.

I like that statement, “the Lord took me,” and from that I gather it was Calvary. [Laughter] “The Lord took me,” Chapter 7, Verse 14 and Verse 15. And you might also compare Chapter 1 in Verse 1. He regarded himself as just laid hold of by the Lord God,

and thrust him to his ministry. Amos' prophecy has been said to be one of unmitigated doom. But there was one way in which Amos was like Micah. He always said no to the total destruction of the people of Israel. The prophecy concludes with a divine never that is, they will have their land and they will never be turned out of it. I would suggest that that means they will possess that land eternally. Since they will never be turned out of it.

Amos' final vision begins with Chapter 9 in Verse 1. And this vision has been called by some “The War on Pretense.” In Chapter 9 in Verse 1, we have the beginning of that which finally winds up with Amos Chapter 9 in Verse 11 through Verse 15. I'll turn to it in the Old Testament text.

You may remember that in the division of the kingdoms that took place at the prime of Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Jeroboam is Jeroboam the first; felt that it was necessary for him in order to keep the people from ultimately drifting back to the seven kingdoms, to have what they had. And so he thought it was necessary for him to have some calves to worship. He thought it was necessary to have an altar. He thought it was necessary to have sacrifices. He thought it was necessary to have a priesthood, because he realized that if they kept going back to Jerusalem where the feasts had to be observed, sooner or later their hearts would be won back to the seven kingdoms. And so he conceives by introducing in the north, the things that would be like things in the south.

And so he stood by a false altar and he offered false and evil sacrifices because they were disobedient; disobedient to the word of God. And he did it hypocritically. You can -- as you look at Amos Chapter 9, you can see some of that here because Amos describes the vision that he has and he's thinking and seeing the Lord's, or Jeroboam the second, because it is Jeroboam the second now, it's very striking that it's also a Jeroboam, incidentally, who was standing by the altar in the Northern kingdom and suddenly Jeroboam the second fades out of the picture, and there is the Lord God standing by the altar.

As one of the commentators says of Jeroboam's actions, "The whole thing is a counterfeit, a counterfeit feast on a counterfeit altar, to prophet the counterfeit monarchy. In Amos' day the sham comes to an end. The prophet watches, the theme changes, and then the counterfeit is succeeded by the real; the human by the divine, the king by the King, the Lord God. And he is going to cast the dynasty down." And as this commentator says again, "The day of pretense is over and the war on pretense has begun." And you read from Verse 1 through Verse 6 and you read something of that until you come to Verse 7. Now these verses, 7, 8, 9 and 10, are very important for our study since they immediately precede the verses cited by James in Acts 15.

Underlying here the identity are those provoking the Lord's hostility. The them of Verse 4 are those living in spiritual dream worlds; forgetful of holiness, sin and its reward, fancying that the date in history, God's calling them out of Egypt. That date in history has put God eternally in their depth and irrespective of their character, they may count upon God's cooperation.

Now if that is not a description of many of us, even in the evangelical church, today, I'd like to find one that is better. There are many people who sit in on our evangelical churches and they have the idea, because they have gone through what an evangelical friend speaks of as "being converted." And yet they are there for utterly safe and safe forever though they, it becomes evident in many cases, have never really had an evangelical conversion. It's so easy in our society today to say the words that evangelicals say and to gain acceptance, because these evangelicals are nice people as a whole, they're tenderhearted people. When someone says, "I believed in Christ," you want to receive them. But we need to remember for ourselves first and for others as well that the evidence of our evangelicalism is seen in our Christian life. It doesn't have to be seen by fellow man, but if there is no reality down here of love for the Lord, love for the Word, desire to please Him and also a life that is, in some respects, at least pleasing to Him, then

we need to ask ourselves the question, “Have we really faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?” So the them in Verse 4 are those who are living in a spiritual dream world.

The verses indicate several important things, and then we'll have to stop with this. First, Israel, as all nations, is equally subject to Yahweh's sovereign will, Verse 7 through the middle part of Verse 8. In fact, it may seem surprising, but Amos says, “Look, there is no difference between Israel and the nations.” In fact, Israel is equated before Yahweh with her two great archenemies; the Egyptians and the Philistines. Isn't that amazing? He thought there was something different. No, there is no difference. If Israel does not respond, there is no difference.

And of course, we learn from other passages in James, and Amos will tell us here in Verses 13, 14, and 15, there is a national difference. Israel does have a future of a nation. But when it comes to an individual, don't look back to some date in history and say I'm forever safe. They are like the Egyptians and Philistines if there is no change of heart. Hans Velka, one of the better known of the scholarly commentators, says here that, “Kingdom is used in the sense of royal house,” which will be important in understanding James' use of the citation. One divine government rules over all and an historical act, even Exodus does not convey blessing. In fact, Israel is worse off than the nations, for she had the law. It's like Amos says in Chapter 3, Verse 2 you know he says, “ You only have I known of all the nations on the earth”. Marvelous doctrine of divine election, therefore he says, “I'll punish you for your iniquity.” So Amos points that out, he says that God's going to destroy the sinful kingdom. Now, notice he's talking about the kingdom because that will be the sin that we will have to give Verses 11 and 12. Then Amos, in a few moments, will talk about the tabernacle of David that has fallen.

Well, our time is up. We've got to stop. Most of you stayed awake. A few of you nodded a little bit. But we will pick this up in our next study and we will take a look at the Old Testament passage and then we'll compare it with the new, and we'll begin to

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discuss some of the questions of interpretation that this raises. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] How grateful we are, Lord, for these passages from Holy Scripture, and how rewarding these are to us as we reflect upon them, and how challenging they have become to us. We ask, Lord, by Thy grace, that we may have in our lives the reality of which Amos is speaking, in which Amos designed for the children of Israel. Deliver us from sham and pretense. There is so much of it in our lives. As we look at our lives, so often we see the same kinds of things that troubled the Israelites. O God, deliver us from that sin. Teach us to lean upon Christ and by Thy grace to wait upon Thee and to earnestly desire and long for the manifestation of the work of God in our lives today.

We thank Thee for this time together.

In Jesus' name. Amen.