

The Tabernacle of David

By Phillip G. Kayser · Acts 15:14-18 · 2007-11-25

Claude McDonald tells the story of a farmer who sent his nephew a crate of chickens from his farm. And as the young man was unloading it and transferring the crate, it broke open and all the chickens ran helter skelter. It took him hours, but he finally caught what he thought were most of the chickens. The next day he wrote to his uncle and said, "I chased them through my neighbors yard, but I only got back eleven of the chickens." The uncle responded a few days later saying, "You did all right. I only sent six chickens." And that's sort of the way it is in the passage in Amos 9 that James quotes.

James quotes Amos 9:11-12. And it's a promise that comes after ten frightening verses which promise judgment and exile, and guarantee that the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel would be scattered throughout the world. In effect, six chickens are lost. But then comes God's search for His people and His rebuilding of Israel. And by the time Amos chapter 9 is done, it's not just a restoration of six chickens, or even an addition of a few more. The restoration is so glorious that it makes the previous state fade by comparison. So you have God scattering Israel and then regathering Israel, but He regathers far more than he scattered. In the regathering comes all the Gentile nations. It's really a wonderful prophecy.

But I want us to think of that judgment that came first. Back in 722 BC, many of the proverbial chickens of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were slaughtered and many were taken into captivity. Amos starts with a frightening picture of utter ruin to people who have refused to repent of their sins and of their independence from God. Only a tiny remnant would be preserved from that northern kingdom. Warren Wiersbe once said in connection with a later judgment, "God would rather see His land devastated, the city of Jerusalem ruined, His temple destroyed, and His people killed and exiled, than to have them give such a false witness to the Gentile nations." That's a sobering place to begin a sermon, but we live in a time when the church is in ruins, the

chickens are scattered, and we need to see the seriousness of this situation if we are to appreciate the solution. And there is a glorious solution.

But first, we need to put these verses into their right context. There are some people who teach that they apply only after the Second Coming and don't directly apply to us today. And since almost all of us rub shoulders with these Dispensationalists, and since I was one myself at one time, I think it would be helpful to understand their interpretation. These are good people, but they have seriously misunderstood this text, and consequently misapply it. I won't spend much time on this. But I have written their position and its weaknesses out in full on the first side of your handout so that you can study it in more detail if you have questions.

A common misinterpretation **(dispensationalism)**

They will say that this is the most natural reading of the text. I disagree, but let me go ahead and give their interpretation the best presentation that I can. Verse 14 says, "Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name." They will say, "Notice the word 'first.'" That shows that the church age described in verse 14 comes before the kingdom age described in verses 16-17.

They will say, "Notice second that the church age is characterized by a Gentile people who is saved." This Gentile people is quite different from Israel. The Gentile people is the church. They insist that you misinterpret Scripture unless you keep in mind the principle written in point I.C.1. Let me quote from them: "The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity."^[1] Dispensationalists deny covenant theology. In other words, they deny a unity of God's people, a unity of God's purposes, a unity of Scripture (because they are New Testament believers with the Old Testament applying to Jews), and they used to deny a unity of salvation, but they have since changed that with the New Scofield Bible.

Verse 15. "And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:" They will say, "Yes, these words do agree with Peter. But the only point of

agreement between the church age and the Gentile age is that God saves both Jew and Gentile. But they are different in every other way." So they will insist that James is not proving a unity of people, a unity of purpose or a doing away with ceremonial laws. They believe ceremonial laws will be reestablished in the future. So they insist that the only point that Amos is proving is that Gentiles can get saved. Just as a side note: Jews never doubted that. But anyway, let's move on with their interpretation.

Verse 16 says, "After this" [Dispensationalists say that James is not summarizing anything implied in the written document of Amos. Instead, he is adding words to clarify that what James is quoting takes place after the 2000 year period that Peter is talking about. They say that this is simply James' "heads up" that the kingdom age comes after the church age. They disagree with covenant theology which says that we are in the kingdom age. Back to verse 16: "After this"] "I will return" [they say, "that is the Second Coming"], "and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins and I will set it up..." So they say the order clearly is 1) the church age (verse 14), 2) after this the Second Coming, 3) then a rebuilt temple with reestablished sacrifices and a restored Davidic kingdom that will rule over the nations.

Verse 17: "So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things." They say that this describes Jesus ruling over all the nations of the earth for 1000 years once his throne is set up.

There is a certain logic to their interpretation. They've got their chart, and they are trying to fit it into the text. But they miss all kinds of contextual clues. And I am not going to go over all of the critiques of that viewpoint that are on the first half of the outline [see below], but I think if you turn to side two of the outline, you will see that the historic interpretation is far more natural. [go to Roman numeral II for the rest of the sermon.]

Dispensational view of the timing

God "first" takes a people from among the Gentiles. This is the present church age and is the subject that Peter was talking about (v. 14)

Problem: "the first" is not a contrast between ages but a contrast between the early inclusion of the Gentiles that Peter had referred to and the present debate.

"After this" (that is, after the church age Peter just mentioned), Jesus will return. (v. 16a)

Problem: The text clearly says, "Just as it is written: 'After this...'" James sees himself as accurately reflecting the meaning of Amos (a written document), not the meaning of Peter's speech (not a written document).

Problem: This contradicts verse 15 which identifies Acts 10 as the fulfillment of Amos 9 ("And with this the words of the prophets agree").

Problem: The word "return" is not the word for the Second Coming, but has a range of meaning of "1) overturn, 2) spend time, stay, live, 3) conduct oneself, behave in a certain way, 4) to be involved with someone closely, to associate, 5) to return or come back to a locality." The dictionary says, "conduct is the issue." The text clearly refers to God's actions on behalf of the remnant of Israel, not the Second Coming.

After the return of Christ, He will establish David's kingdom and temple (v. 16b). He now has the "title to the throne of David" but will actually sit on the throne of David in the millennium.

Problem: It is difficult to see how this meaning could in any way relate to Peter's discussion at point.

Problem: It contradicts the whole point of the Jerusalem Council which is ending the requirement of Levitical rituals (which rituals Premillennialism says will be resurrected in the millennium).

During this millennium, Israelites ("the remnant of men") and "all the Gentiles" will seek the Lord (v. 17)^[2]

Problem: Verse 17 doesn't contrast "the rest of mankind" with Gentiles, but instead identifies them with the Gentiles ("even all the Gentiles").

Dispensational view of the nature of David's tabernacle

"the blessings will be earthly and national and will have nothing to do with the church."^[3]

Problem: James is defending the arguments of Paul, Barnabas and Peter and says that Amos agrees with this new mystery of Jew and Gentile being together (v. 15). Their speech has nothing whatsoever to do with earthly and national.

Christ will restore "David's" kingdom on earth and the Jews will rule over the world (vv. 16-17).

Problem: The text says nothing about Israel ruling over the nations. The whole context is of Gentiles being included in the one people of verse 14.

Dispensational view of the church and Israel

"The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity."^[4]

Problem: Instead of seeing two peoples in Acts 15, it speaks of only "one people." Though the national differences of Jews and other nations remains, "God has made no distinction between us and them" (v. 9) and believing Gentiles are now part of a "people for His name" (a title previously reserved for Israel). It is not simply Jews who have His name, but He speaks of "Gentiles who are called by My name" (v. 17). The whole flow of the argument is against two peoples.

The church age is the time of the Gentiles (v. 14) and the age of the kingdom is the age of Israel (vv. 16-17). Though Gentiles will be saved, they must submit to Israel's national dominance (vv. 15-17). The New Schofield Bible divides verse 17 into "the rest of mankind" = Jews and "all the Gentiles" = the rest of the nations who will submit to Israel.

Problem: Whatever the "return" and the "rebuild" of verse 16 is, it results in the Gentiles coming to the Lord (see the "so that" in verse 17). This turns their argument upside down and implies that the time of Gentile conversion is not till after the Second Coming (the opposite of what they want).

Problem: How could verses 16-17 possible "agree" (see v. 15) with what Peter spoke in verses 7-11 if they don't relate to the church age?

Exposition of it's meaning

The context is talking about what constitutes the church, not what constitutes national entities.

What's the context of James' speech? One rule of interpretation that Dispensationalists frequently violate is that you shouldn't take phrases out of context. And it's quite clear that the context has nothing to do with national political entities. James is defending Paul's inclusion of Gentiles in the *church* and James is also defending Paul's statements that the ceremonial law is no longer binding. The context goes completely contrary to the dispensational interpretation. It just doesn't fit.

Simon says that in the church, God has started something new: believing Jew and Gentile are one body and God has "made no distinction between" them (vv. 8-11).

Second, the issue that had mystified some of these Jews in the first century is how both Jews and Gentiles can be in one body. Look at verse 5. "But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." The Judaizers were convinced that Jews and Gentiles could not be part of one body. They had to become Jews, which for them meant circumcision and keeping all the ceremonial laws. Paul disagreed. Paul said that God had revealed a mystery to every one of the apostles that (as Ephesians 3 words it) "the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel."

So back to Acts 15:6, verse 6 says, "Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter." They weren't considering a future state of the Jews, or

politics or future kingdom. They were considering *this matter*. And Peter is the first one to get up and agree with Paul. Let's read verses 7-11.

Acts 15:7 And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

Acts 15:8 So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as *He did* to us,

Acts 15:9 and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Acts 15:10 Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

Acts 15:11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

What Peter is stating is the exact opposite of Dispensationalism. He is affirming a unity of people, unity of purpose and a unity of salvation. But certainly he is insisting that the Gentiles (as Gentiles) can be in the church without becoming Jews. And so it is astonishing to me when Charles Ryrie says about verses 16-17, "the blessings will be earthly and national and will have nothing to do with the church."^[5] Let me repeat that: He says, , "the blessings will be earthly and national and will have nothing to do with the church." *Nothing* to do with the church?!! Well, if that is true, why is he bringing it up to settle a church controversy? And further, why would James say what he did in verses 13-15? Let me read that:

Acts 15:13 And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men *and* brethren, listen to me:

Acts 15:14 Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.

Acts 15:15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

James is saying that Peter and Amos are talking about exactly the same thing. "With this" (in other words, what Peter has just been talking about), "the words of the prophets agree." And it isn't a narrow tangential agreement. He says it is "just as it is written."

Notice too that Dispensationalists can't weasel out of the first words of verse 16. They claim that "After this" is not in Amos either in meaning or in form or in application. The "after this" refers to Peter's comments, not Amos' comments, and so they shouldn't be in quotation marks. But look at that verse again: James is quite clear that the "After this" is inherent in the meaning of

Amos. He is interpreting Amos here. "As it is written: 'After this I will return...' etc. What is written? "After this" is written. So, whether he is summarizing Amos, translating or paraphrasing, or simply giving the meaning, James' words imply a contrast between two periods within Amos. This is the historic position.

Whatever verses 16-17 mean, based on the words in verse 15 ("with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written") they must directly relate to Peter's two main points:

God now makes no distinction between Jews and Gentile in the church (v. 9). This is known as Paul's doctrine of the "mystery" (Eph. 3:3-6 – "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise...").

So whatever verses 16-17 mean, Amos' words must be somehow related to Peter's two main points. Peter's first main point is stated in verse 9 – "And made no distinction between us and them..." Get those two words: "no distinction." Gentiles are not second class citizens. Peter is saying exactly the same thing that Paul says in Ephesians 3:3-6 "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise." Do you see the problem? Dispensationalists say that verses 16-17 are teaching that there have been, are and always will be two different peoples and two different purposes. The Israel of the future kingdom will not be part of the bride, according to them. But James says that these words of the prophets agree with Peter's statement. The historic interpretation fits the context.

That the ceremonial laws are no longer binding on anyone (vv. 10-11; see also Galatians, Colossians, Hebrews). Once Jesus, the final temple, the final sacrifice and the final priest had come, there is no more role for another temple.

The second main point that Peter makes is that the ceremonial laws are no longer binding on anyone. Peter has been eating non-Kosher food. He obviously did not see ceremonial laws as binding. Those ceremonial laws are purely optional. And in verse 10 he calls any imposition of ceremonial law a testing of God. Peter is just as strong on this as Paul was in Galatians. Once Jesus came, it becomes clear that He is the final temple, priest and sacrifice. And the quote from Amos has something to do with all of that – "with this the words of the prophet agree." And so, for me it is astonishing that Dispensationalists can fit a future period when there will once again be two

separate peoples, with Israel dominating, the Gentiles serving, and with temple, priesthood and sacrifices all resurrected, and that that is what verses 16-17 is talking about. That would be a great way to disprove Peter, not to support him.

The words "After this" imply that there are two periods of time in Amos, not simply a difference between a supposed age discussed by Peter and another age discussed by James. As James words it: "just as it is written: 'After this...'" The "after this" is clearly an implication of the written text.

This in turn means that the "this" of verse 16 refers to the Assyrian captivity of Amos 9:9-10. Acts 15:16 is not referring to something after the church age, but something after 722 BC when the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria.

But turn with me to Amos 9. Amos is three books after Daniel. Daniel, Hosea, Joel and Amos. And in chapter 9 Amos describes the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. If you know your history, you know that Israel had been divided into two kingdoms. 209 years before Amos 9 (in 931 BC) Solomon's son imposed such tyranny that the ten northern tribes revolted and formed northern Israel and the two southern tribes stayed with Rehoboam and formed Judah. So from that time on there were two nations. Amos in this chapter is talking about the destruction of the northern kingdom in 722 BC. If you look at verse 1 you will see the beginning of the metaphorical ruins of Israel – "I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and He said: "Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake, and break them on the heads of them all. I will slay the last of them with the sword..." And then begins a terrifying description of how God would punish Israel and cast them out among the nations. Now here is the interesting thing: the temple wasn't up in the northern kingdom. It was down in Jerusalem. The northern kingdom was judged and scattered long before the southern kingdom of Judah. So this altar, doorposts and threshold are all totally metaphors of the northern kingdom because it is only the northern kingdom that is being judged. And in contrast, it is clear that it is a metaphor, not a literal building because in addition to their being a temple He switches mid-sentence to people. When the people are ruined, it is the metaphorical tabernacle of David that is ruined. He ends His description of judgment in verses 9-10:

Amos 9:9 "For surely I will command, And will sift the house of Israel among all nations, As *grain* is sifted in a sieve; Yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground.

Amos 9:10* All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword, Who say, "The calamity shall not overtake nor confront us.'

According to James, Amos then talks about something that comes after this judgment. Amos puts the paragraphs in historical sequence, and James is simply making note of that. The "On that day" of verse 11 comes after the judgments of verses 1-10. And by the way, the "on that day" is a phrase repeatedly used of the Messianic period. So the readers would have understood that this was future. Verse 11 says, "after this".

This in turn means that the words, "I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David" must refer to something Jesus did in the first century. Even some premillennialists have been forced to this exegetical conclusion.^[6]

When all of that context is taken into account, that means that God's returning and rebuilding the tabernacle of David must refer to something Jesus did in the first century. There is no getting around it. I won't get into all of the nitty gritty exegetical details, but even Premillennialists like J. Barton Payne have been forced to this conclusion. In the footnote I quote him as saying that this tabernacle is in part, ""The revival of the line of David in the Person of Jesus Christ. The reference must be to His first coming; for Acts 15:16 emphasizes that it is this event which enables the Gentiles, from the apostolic period onward, to seek God... [that is] The effect of the coming of Christ... Yet 'after these things' (Acts 15:16, i.e. the exile and the preservation of Amos 9:9-10)... and after Christ's incarnation (Amos 9:11)... came the engrafting of uncircumcised Gentiles into the church, to which Acts 15 applies the OT passage, so it cannot refer to times yet future." So the historic position of all viewpoints: premil, amil and postmil is that verses 16-17 of Acts 15 refers to the church being rebuilt first from the Jews and later of the Gentiles being grafted in.

God does indeed "return" (Zech 1:3; Mal. 3:7) or "come" (John 1:11) or "visit" (Luke 1:68,78; 7:16; 19:44) Israel in the first coming (see also Acts 15:14 "visited the Gentiles"). If "return" is

preferred, it is because God had abandoned them, and was now turning back again with favor.

But some dispensationalists might think: "What about the word "return." And the answer is that in Amos 9:1-10 God abandons Israel, and in the Incarnation God returns to Israel. As Malachi 3:7 words it, "Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts. It's *that* kind of return. It's not the words used with the Second Coming elsewhere. And it happened in the first century when God became Immanuel – God with us. Luke 1:68,78 and Luke 7:16 all speak of the time of the incarnation as the time that God visited His people Israel. Luke 19:44 accuses Israel of not knowing the time of their visitation. So it is a perfectly natural rendering to say that the Israel that had been abandoned finds that God returned to them in the first century.

He did rebuild the tabernacle when He "tabernacled among us" in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14) and set up the "temple of His body" (John 2:21). Christ's body is called the tabernacle of David because He is the Son of David and because Christ represents the kingdom.

And it is interesting that John 1:14 says that this Incarnation was God tabernacling among men. God did indeed set up a new tabernacle. Christ's body is called the temple of God in John 2:21 and because Jesus descended from David, He is the Tabernacle of David.

But there is a body connected to Jesus, isn't there? And the whole body that is united to Jesus is also called the temple and is a part of that kingdom. And in Jesus, the former ruins is being put back together as the church is built up of spiritual stones. What was the former tabernacle of David made of? Do you remember how Amos 9:1 describes the people as the tabernacle? And how God will destroy that tabernacle – how? by destroying the people? It's not a physical temple. That was in the southern kingdom. This tabernacle that Amos is talking about is made up people now scattered to the winds. So it is perfectly natural to say that the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David is the salvation of people from every tribe of Israel, as happened in the earthly church. Another way of saying it is that Amos is clearly a metaphorical tabernacle, therefore we should take its application in Acts 15 as metaphorical.

The ruins in Amos is a reference to the scattered people of Israel, the remnant of which was reformulated from the twelve tribes in Acts 1-2 as a new Israel, never again to be destroyed.

We spent some time in Acts 1-2 demonstrating that God had indeed reconstituted the twelve tribes of Israel, with twelve princes, twelve groups of ten men, prophets and the minimum number of leaders (120) to constitute a new community. Once this New Spiritual Israel was reconstituted from the remnant of the Old Israel, it would never again be totally destroyed. And so, yes, Acts 15:16-17 is metaphorical just like everyone agrees that the Amos 9 passage was describing a metaphorical building.

As a result of the new Israel being established in Jesus all the rest of human kind will seek God (v. 17). Paul's principle of "to the Jews first, and also to the Gentiles" was consistent with this.

So Amos 9 describes three periods of history: 1) verses 1-10 are pre-Christ; 2) verses 11-12 are from Pentecost through and including this whole present era of missions ingathering; and 3) verses 13-15 are the time of the glory of the kingdom when there will be peace, righteousness and prosperity in the earth. Once the fullness of the Gentiles comes in (that's Amos 9:12), then verses 13-15 kicks in – even greater blessing to the world through the full conversion of Israel. Or you could describe it this way:

Verses 1-10 describes the scattering of Israel to the four corners of the globe. Verse 11 describes the conversion and reconstituting of a remnant of Israel. Verse 12 describes the great missions effort that is happening right now. And verses 13-15 shows a saved Israel regathered to the land and bringing great blessing to the world. This is exactly the order laid out in Romans 11.

As a result of the new Israel being established in Jesus, all the non-Jewish nations (= "Gentiles") will be called by His name (v. 17)

Before I make application of all of this, let me make two more points from Acts 15. Verse 17 says, that as a result of the first century rebuilding of the ruins of the house of David, the rest of mankind would become Christianized. It says, "So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD." This deals with individual

salvation throughout the world. But it goes beyond that. It clarifies and says, "even all the Gentiles" [or that could be translated "all the nations"] "who are called by My name." What a beautiful statement of the Great Commission. Our call in Matthew 28 is not simply to win a few individuals. Our call is to disciple all nations, teaching them to observe all things that He has commanded us.

This world conquest will be invincible because it is not simply done by man, but it is promised by "the LORD who does all these things."

And He ends the great commission by saying, "Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age." If we had any doubt about whether the Great Commission could really be accomplished, that promise (of being with us) was designed to wipe out that doubt. He will be with us. He has not left us to this task alone. And that is where verse 17 ends: "Says the LORD who does all these things." It's God who accomplishes it.

So that is the bird's eye view of these verses and what they mean. Let's now try to apply these verses to our lives.

Applications

God is in the restoration business (v. 16) both individually and corporately (vv. 1-12). We are ruins being restored by His grace.

The first obvious application is that God is in the restoration business. Why did Jesus come? Verse 16 tells us. "After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up." What encouraging words in a time when we are living in ruin and desolation. Divorce rates have never been as high in America; families are breaking apart; pornography is everywhere; there is a drug epidemic; the occult is on the rise; music is demonic; God is kicked out of the courts; our nation has turned morals upside down; 3000 babies are murdered in the womb every day; students are educated in godlessness; suicide is increasing. America is in ruins. Why? Because we have abandoned God and God has abandoned us. He doesn't want us to enjoy our tabernacle when we are living in rebellion. Remember the quote I started with from Warren Wiersbe? He said, "God would rather see His land devastated, the city of Jerusalem ruined, His temple destroyed, and His people killed and exiled, than to have them give

such a false witness to the Gentile nations." The church in America has been giving a false witness to the nations, and as a result our strength is diminished and our influence has been scattered. So God has been in the judgment business in America, but that is not His only business. He doesn't just bring ruin to rebels. He delights in bringing restoration.

And what should be our response? In verses 1-5 the Pharisees wanted to exclude people with messed up, ruined lives. But the apostles are arguing: "That's the whole point of the New Covenant – it's to restore ruined lives. God is in the restoration business." Let's reach out to hurting people and help them.

God restores broken down individuals who are messed up with drugs, bad education, emotional problems, bitterness and all the other destructive things that Satan tries to bring into our lives. And when they put their trust in Jesus – casting their sins upon Him and receiving His gift of righteousness, He makes them new creatures and begins the process of making all things new.

He restores families that are broken and lying in ruins. We live in an age of divorce, loneliness and fragmented families. But this is also the age where Christ's grace is destined to triumph over all of that.

His grace can rebuild ruined churches. His grace can rebuild ruined cultures. There is no reason to give up. The God who made Rome a Christian nation can turn our nation upside down and transform it too. We need to be convinced of the power of His grace and that the New Covenant era is primarily the era of restoration and rebuilding.

God sovereignly initiates salvation and we can be confident that He knows how to reach the toughest people.

He visited the Gentiles (v. 14). He took out a people (v. 14). He turns to them (v. 16). He builds and sets up (v. 16). He does all these things (v. 17)

A second application that we can make is that this isn't totally up to us. In fact, if it was up to us, there would be every reason to be discouraged. Scripture pictures us as dead in our sins, unable to come to God and unable to help ourselves until He draws us. As Bob Dylan worded it:

I was blinded by the devil,

Born already ruined,

Stone cold dead

As I stepped out of the womb.

That is the state of every one of us apart from grace. But this passage speaks of sovereign grace; powerful grace. God's the one who initiates salvation, not us. Verse 14 says, "Simon has declared how *God* at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name." He didn't wait for people to make the first move. God reached down and made them ready. *He* turns to them in verse 16. *He* builds and *He* sets up. Verse 17 ends with the words, "the Lord who does all these things." What a wonderful reminder that God begins, continues and finishes this work of rebuilding. So if you think your family is beyond rebuilding, look to the One who can do it.

But that does not rule out our seeking (v. 17).

Now this doesn't rule out our seeking Him. Verse 17 says that the Gentiles will indeed seek Him. But it explains that they seek because He first sought them. If your heart is beginning to have hope that God can make a difference, it is because God is preparing you and already beginning that setting up process. Don't hold back. Give Him everything, so that He can finish the powerful work that He has begun.

He can use us even when our lives are ruins (v. 16)

And some people might think, "Why would I give my life to Christ? It is worthless. I've ruined myself with drugs, relationships, and many shameful things. I have nothing that I can contribute." And my response is: "So you are saying that you fit the category of ruins in verse 16?" You see, you need to take your eyes off of yourself and put them onto Jesus, the master builder. He's the only one that can make your life count. Just think of a hunk of paper. By itself it is not worth much. But when a poet like Longfellow writes on it, that paper suddenly gains huge worth. When the US government takes a worthless piece of paper and puts a picture of Andrew Jackson on it, the paper becomes worth \$20. Jesus can take what isn't worth much and by His declaration, work and stamp upon our lives make it very valuable in his kingdom.

You are probably familiar with Padarewski the concert pianist. The story goes that a young child was taken by his mother to one of Padarewski's concerts to give the child incentive to practice more. They were sitting in the front row and the mother fell into a conversation with an old acquaintance. While she was

talking the boy darted up to the platform, seated himself at the piano and started playing with one finger, "Twinkle, twinkle little star." When the mother realized it was her kid, she was so mortified that she didn't know if she should hide or yank her son off stage. But before she could get up to the platform Padarewski had come out and was standing behind the boy whispering something in his ear. Then with hands on either side of the boy he began to fill in the gaps as the boy played twinkle, twinkle little star. The dumpy little tune that the boy was playing became a beautiful piece to listen to. This is what God does with our works. Certainly we are feeble in the things that we do, but the dumpy little tunes that we are playing for God to the best of our ability become beautiful tunes in God's ears and become beautiful acts of ministry in the church and the world because God is with us. God doesn't need our ruins. They are ruins. But He delights to glorify His name by making our ruins restored and usable.

God's kingdom should be like a magnet to the nations (v. 17 – "so that"). Are we part of that magnetic power? We must not horde the glorious blessings.

The fourth application is that God's kingdom should be like a magnet to the nation. Verse 16 speaks of a rebuilt church and verse 17 gives the result. It was rebuilt "So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD..." If a church is not reaching out to a lost world, it is still in need of its own rebuilding. Why do I say that? Because rebuilding leads to missions. God doesn't want us hoarding the riches of His grace to ourselves. He wants us to be so transformed that we are excited and can't help but tell others about it. Are you a magnet that draws others to Christ? Is your family a magnet? Is this church a magnet? If not – and I believe we have a long ways to go, it is because there is still room for God's work of rebuilding within us.

Some people are so ashamed of their past that they don't want to attract the attention of others. They just can't get over thinking about how awful they are. They can't get beyond their shame. I think of the story of Roy Riegels in 1929. Pastor Glenn would tell you that Georgia Tech stomped his team University of California at Berkley. It was actually a pretty close game, ending at 8-7. Rosebowllegends.org gives the story. It says,

Roy "Wrong Way" Riegels (April 4, 1908–March 26, 1993) played for the University of California, Berkeley football team from 1927–1929. His wrong-way run in the

1929 Rose Bowl Game is often cited as the worst blunder in the history of college football.

"What am I seeing?" announcer Graham McNamee screamed as he broadcast the 1929 Rose Bowl game between Georgia Tech and California. "Am I crazy? Am I crazy? Am I crazy? Am I crazy? Am I crazy?"

In those moments of football history, Roy Riegels, a center and captain-elect of the California Bears, snagged a football fumbled by Georgia Tech back "Stumpy" Thomason. He caught the fumble on first bounce, got bumped, spun around and finding himself suddenly in the clear, sprinted frantically toward the goal line 64 yards distant.

He was headed the wrong way.

Teammate Benny Lom, a fleet halfback, chased Riegels half the length of the field, shouting "Stop! Stop! Turn back, Roy.... You're going the wrong way!"

Thinking the speedier Lom was pleading for the ball to out-race the pursuing Georgia Tech players, Riegels yelled back, "Giddoutta here, Benny! This is my ball!"

It wasn't until he had almost crossed the goal line, with Lom pulling at him, that Riegels understood and tried to reverse direction. It was too late. Georgia Tech gang-tackled him at the one-yard line.

They tried to punt out of the end zone, but it got blocked by Georgia Tech, which gave them a safety, enough to win.

Well you can imagine the horrible dismay that Riegels must have had. I did a little research, and found that at halftime, the California players filed into the dressing room, and as others sat down on benches or on the floor (stunned by what had happened), Riegels put a blanket around his shoulders and sat in a corner with his face in his hands. Coach Price said nothing during half time and was trying to decide what to do with Riegels. When the timekeeper told them they had three minutes before playing time, Coach Price said, "Men, the same team that played the first half will start the second." The players all got up except for Riegels who didn't budge. The coach looked back and called to him, "Roy, didn't you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second." Roy Riegels looked up with his cheeks wet with tears and said, "Coach. I can't do it. I've ruined you. I've ruined the university's reputation. I've ruined myself. I can't face the crowd out there." And the coach simply said, "Roy, get up and go back. The game is only half over." (from Mike

Leiter) And from what I understand, Roy played the second half hard and he played it well. They still didn't win. But even though 450,000 column inches of newspaper space were written about his blunder (how embarrassing), and he was sent hate mail, and all kinds of gag gifts, and was even given membership cards to Georgia Tech's alumni organization, he took it in stride and lived with good humor and didn't allow it to control him.

What verse 16 is telling us is that we need to do the same. All of us are messed up sinners. We all have a lot to be embarrassed about. All of us are ruined. All of us have betrayed Christ by running the ball toward the wrong goal posts. *But* you can't live in the past. Jesus came to forgive us, to restore us and to help us play the second half of our game. And if you have been sitting out the game because of remorse, get over it. Take verse 16 as your theme verse and act on it. Don't let Satan tell you that you can't be fixed or can't be forgiven. You can and you will if you will believe in Jesus.

There are no longer any second class citizens (v. 9; Eph. 2:19-22)

A fifth application that we can make is that there are no longer any second class citizens within the church. Once you have repented of your sins and put your trust in Jesus, you are a full part of the team – and we need you. The Pharisees tried to embarrass the Gentiles. They tried to turn them into second class citizens, but the apostles wouldn't let them. Verse 9 says that God has "made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." Paul says of each one who believes and joins the church,

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

The moment we start treating one member of the body as a second class citizen, as less important, or as unimportant, we are disobeying the spirit of this General Assembly. It doesn't matter how far your life has fallen, when God builds you and indwells you, you are equal citizens of the kingdom. And we want to value you.

Rejoice that the times of tearing down are over (Amos 9:1-10) and the times of rebuilding are here (Amos 9:11-12).

A sixth application that we can make is that we have every reason to rejoice that the times of tearing down are over and the times of rebuilding are here. Things are not getting worse and worse in this world. They may be going downhill in America for a season. But the promise of Isaiah 9 is that the increase of Christ kingdom will have no end. The promise of Matthew 16 is that Jesus will build His church so invincibly that even the gates of hell will not be able to prevail against the church. This is a verse that gives us hope, and you must not let the newspaper rob you of faith and hope.

We cannot have a lesser goal than the Great Commission – all nations being Christianized.

But this brings us to point G. This means that we have every reason to set our sights much higher than simply the salvation of a few. We must not have a lesser goal that Jesus did. His goal in the great commission was to disciple all nations and teach all nations how to observe all things that He has given to us in His Word. Jesus is in the business of restoration and rebuilding of individuals, families and cultures. This is a culture transforming goal.

To question whether the Great Commission can be fulfilled is to doubt God's power (v. 17).

Point H reminds us that to question whether the Great Commission can be fulfilled is to doubt God's power. It is true that Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing." But it is equally true that two verses later, in John 15:7 Jesus said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." Don't doubt. Believe the power of God. This is why verse 17 ends with the promise that it is the Lord who will do all these things. Let's have faith in His power.

We should pray for and work for the restoration of the glory of the church (v. 16).

And so I end this sermon by admonishing you to pray for and work for the restoration of the glory of the church worldwide. There will never be a time when there won't be some ruins to fix, because every time ruins get fixed in verse 16, more ruined people are added to the mix in verse 17. And so there

should never be a time when we are not preaching Reformation. The Gospel call is a call to believe, be saved and to change. Our whole life is a call to change. We should never get in a holy huddle. We should never be satisfied with the status quo. Instead, we must pray for and work for the restoration of the glory of the church worldwide and never give up on your own sanctification. And may God receive the glory as we live these verses out. Amen.

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1. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* , p. 45 citing Lewis Sperry Chafer. [↗]
 2. See for example the note under Acts 15:13 in the New Schofield Bible. [↗]
 3. Charles Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* , (New York: Loiseaux Brothers, 1953), p. 103. [↗]
 4. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* , p. 45 citing Lewis Sperry Chafer. [↗]
 5. Charles Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* , (New York: Loiseaux Brothers, 1953), p. 103. [↗]
 6. See J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* , p 417 where he says, "The revival of the line of David in the Person of Jesus Christ. The reference must be to His first coming; for Acts 15:16 emphasizes that it is this event which enables the Gentiles, from the apostolic period onward, to seek God... The effect of the coming of Christ... Yet 'after these things' (Acts 15:16, i.e. the exile and the preservation of Amos 9:9-10)... and after Christ's incarnation (Amos 9:11)... came the engrafting of uncircumcised Gentiles into the church, to which Acts 15 applies the OT passage, so it cannot refer to times yet future."* [↗]