

What is the 'Booth of David' in Amos 9:11?

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Introduction

Like many Old Testament prophetic books, the book of Amos provides cutting words of rebuke but also comforting words of hope. In this way, Amos provides both a warning and an invitation. Amos proposes an alternative future that contrasts with Israel's present sinful state.

Amos starts with harsh words of rebuke toward the surrounding nations of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab before turning His attention to the kingdoms of Judah and Israel (Amos 1-2). To each of these nations, Yahweh threatens to send "fire on the walls" and "consume their citadels." In this instance, Yahweh's method of judgment is to tear down and destroy. Thus, it is interesting that the book should end with a promise to "raise up" or rebuild the "booth of David" (Amos 9:11). After comprehensive judgment and destruction, Yahweh plans to rebuild something. This may, in fact, be the main thrust of Amos.

Most scholars suggest that Amos 4-5 contains the main theme of Amos. This is largely the result of an emphasis on the chiasmic literary structure of the book. Chapters 4-5 are tucked neatly into the middle of the book and do fit nicely into the conventional chiasmic structure that is common in the literature of this genre. By positioning the message of the book in chapters 4-5 it can be concluded that the message of Amos contains an element of comparison and contrast between illegitimate worship and legitimate worship. Another way of framing this distinction would be to distinguish between non-sanctioned worship and sanctioned worship.

Yet, Walter Brueggemann suggests that Amos 9:11-15, not Amos 4-5, is the main theme of Amos: "Perhaps the center of Amos is not to be found in chapter iv and v where we have usually located it but in the promise of ix 11-15 where the fidelity of Yahweh is affirmed and therefore the future of Israel is secured."¹ Perhaps Brueggemann is right to point out that the theme of the book should be determined by the message and not simply the literary structure.

¹ Walter Brueggemann, "Amos' Intercessory Formula." *Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 19, no. 4, (Brill, 1969, pp. 385-99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1516734>.) 399

If Brueggemann is correct, then our attention should be drawn to the promises of Amos 9:11-15, in particular, to the rebuilding of David's fallen booth. This paper will explore the booth of David, what it was/is, and how it may be restored as prophesied in Amos 9 and referenced in Acts 15.

This paper contends *that the tent which David erected in 2 Sam 6-7 and parallel passages in 1 Chronicles is what is referred to as the "booth of David" in Amos 9:11.* Thus, the tent housing the Ark and its program of perpetual and prophetic worship centered around the Ark should be the basis for any metaphorical or prophetic interpretations of Amos 9:11.

What is the Booth of David?

There does not seem to be much scholarly consensus on what the fallen booth of David is. Many ideas have been suggested, but the fact that so many ideas have been proposed serves as an indication that the meaning is not clear. In *The NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, D.A. Carson suggests that the booth of David "...in this context probably refers to the monarchy of Judah."² David Allan Hubbard, in his commentary on Amos, suggests at least four possible meanings (one of which is shared by Carson); "(1) Judah's Davidic dynasty which had collapsed (fallen)...2) the influence of that dynasty diminished...3) the city of Jerusalem...4) a return to the premonarchic period..."³ John Barton suggests that "the hope is evidently for an actual new king who will restore the 'empire' that David was believed to have ruled."⁴ As if these were not enough options, Douglas Stuart suggests that a booth, tent or tabernacle is not in view at all in this passage, but that the Hebrew word *sûkkâh* is actually a spelling error and was originally the

² D. A. Carson, *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018). Notes on Amos 9:11.

³ David Allan Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press. 1989). 239

⁴ John Barton, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of the Book of Amos*. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 2012). 125

name of the town of “Succoth,” one of King David’s’ “Transjordan military headquarters.”⁵ In Stuart’s view: “The final oracle in Amos promises that some time in the indefinite future (‘at that time’) a key Davidic Transjordan military headquarters (Succoth) will be rebuilt so as to help Israel subdue ‘all the nations.’”⁶

While it is appropriate to suggest a metaphorical meaning of the booth of David, we must first establish what it is a metaphor of. What is its referent? It is clear that in order to speculate on how this prophecy might be fulfilled, one must understand what exactly the prophecy is referring to. We must know the literal meaning if we are to correctly identify the metaphorical meaning.

There is no record of David spending any extended period of time living in a tent or booth. If in fact, we are referring to David during his rule over Israel, he famously lived in a house of cedar while the Ark was kept in a tent (2 Sam 7:2-3). This may be a clue.

The Hebrew word for “booth” in Amos 9:11 is transliterated *sūkkâh* and can mean “hut,” “booth,” “cottage,” “tabernacle” or “tent” according to Strong’s Concordance.⁷ This wide variety of usage could imply that the “hut of David” is a metaphor for the pathetic state that Israel was in at the time. Perhaps the “cottage of David” could refer to a home of David’s or could be a symbol for his household. However, the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon gives a slightly more narrow definition; “a thicket, covert, booth.”⁸

Furthermore, when the LXX translated *sūkkâh* from Hebrew to Greek the word σκηνήν (transliterated *skēnane*) was used to convey the idea of a tabernacle or tent. Additionally, when the Apostle James quotes Amos 9:11 he (or Luke, the author) relies on the LXX reading and uses

⁵ Douglas Stuart, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 31: Hosea-Jonah*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988). 398

⁶ Stuart, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 399

⁷ James Strong. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 2009. Entry for H5520

⁸ Charles A. Briggs, Frances Brown, and Samuel Rolles Driver. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson), 1996. Entry for סכך (*sūkkâh*).

skēnē to again convey the idea of a tent. Literal English translations like the NASB, ESV and LSB (Legacy Standard Bible) use “booth” to translate *sūkkâh* in Amos 9:11. There is more variety in how these three literal translations convey *skēnē*. The ESV uses “tent,” the LSB uses “booth” and the NASB uses “tabernacle.” In any event, it is clear from the original Hebrew, LXX, Greek New Testament and most literal English translations, the booth of David is most certainly not a dynasty, an era, or a misspelled word as previously suggested.

To put it succinctly—it’s a tent. The Hebrew word means tent, the LXX translated it as a tent, the Apostles understood it as a tent and literal English translations render it as a type of tent. If David was never associated with a tent we may have to search for some metaphorical meaning, but since David is known to have erected a literal tent, this literal interpretation should provide a place to start investigating the metaphorical or prophetic meaning of Amos 9:11.

Therefore, at the risk of further confusing the topic, another possible meaning for the booth of David should be considered; the literal booth, tent, or tabernacle that David erected to house the Ark of the Covenant when he returned it to Jerusalem. It was this tent that established the pattern for the Temple of Solomon. In addition, this tent represented a significant evolution from Mosaic worship to Davidic worship.

Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary comments on this tent: “[David] moved the ARK OF THE COVENANT from Kiriath Jearim (Josh. 15:9) and placed it within a tabernacle that he pitched in Jerusalem. Next, he organized worship on a magnificent scale and began plans to build a house of worship.”⁹ Like Noah’s ark, Moses’ tabernacle and Solomon’s temple, David himself had a tent that he should forever be associated with.

In his massive four-volume commentary on the book of Acts, Craig Keener suggests the possibility of this interpretation, while also acknowledging its challenges: “Certainly David was

⁹ R. F. Youngblood, ed. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 333

involved in restoring the tabernacle (the ark was dislocated in Eli's time, 2 Sam 6:17; 11:11; 1 Chr 15:1, 16:1; 2 Chr. 1:4); David also established prophetic worship in God's house (1 Chr 25:1-3)."¹⁰

In 1 Chr 13-16 David obtained the Ark of the Covenant from the Philistines and plans to return the Ark to its rightful place in Jerusalem. Among his own homes, David had erected a tent to house the Ark upon its return (2 Sam 6:17, 1 Chr 15:1). The tent was pitched before the ark was brought into Jerusalem—David made these plans in advance. Likely, David was recalling the Tabernacle of Moses which had formerly housed the Ark.

The Ark's entrance into the city was accompanied by celebration, music, and dancing, but also the disdain of David's wife Michal (2 Sam 6:16, 1 Chr 15:29). Once the Ark was placed in the tent that David had provided, sacrifices were made and food was provided to the residents of the city so that everyone could celebrate the return of the Ark. Upon the completion of the initial celebration, David appointed ministers to serve perpetually before the Ark. David assigned these ministers to serve before the ark continually with music and burnt offerings (1 Chr 16:37-40). By 1 Chr 23:5, there were 4,000 musicians playing instruments designed by David in the service before the Ark. In addition, there were 288 skillful singers who were to "prophesy with lyres, harps, and cymbals" (1 Chr 25:1). The singers and musicians were organized in a system of 24 family-based teams (1 Chr 25:8-31), perhaps indicating one-hour shifts in rotation, as it was common for those who ministered before the Ark to rotate duties in shifts.

It was this tent and its accompanying program of continual worship, offerings, and prophecy that produced many of the Psalms. It was also this tent that would become the forerunner to the Temple of Solomon (2 Sam 7:2-3, 1 Chr 17:1-2). Thus, this booth, erected by

¹⁰ Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary; Vol. 3*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. 2014). 2256

David, served as a forerunner and a model for the Temple which Jesus desired to be a “house of prayer for all nations” (Mt 21:13).

In summary, the tent that David erected was a place of continual worship with music, sacrifices, and prophesy, centered around God’s presence in/on the Ark. It produced psalms and served as the forerunner and model for the Temple of Solomon. Therefore, in addition to the possible interpretations suggested by Barton, Hubbard, Stuart, and others, the booth of David may very well be referring to the actual, literal, tent established by David.

What did Amos prophesy about the Tabernacle of David?

It is generally agreed upon that the book of Amos provides a stark contrast between illegitimate and legitimate worship or non-sanctioned and sanctioned worship. This distinction is communicated in Amos 4-5. This distinction is also communicated when comparing chapters 1-2 with chapter 9, and specifically Amos 9:1 with Amos 9:11.

The book begins with a reference to an earthquake. Craig Keener and John Walton help place this historical event: “The earthquake cited here and attested by excavations at Hazor (Stratum VI) dates to approximately 760 BC.”¹¹ Worth noting is that Amos is represented as having prophesied: “two years before the earthquake” (Amos 1:1). Amos uses language like “the LORD roars” and “the pasture grounds mourn” (Amos 1:2) to illustrate the devastation of the earthquake.

Amos explains how the earthquake will serve as a type of judgment from God against pagan nations like Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, before turning His attention to the divided kingdoms—Judah in the south and Israel in the north. To each of the

¹¹ Craig Keener and John Walton, *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016). Note on Amos 1:1

pagan nations, Yahweh intends to “send fire on the walls” and “consume the citadels (fortresses).”

While it may take nearly six chapters to return to the destruction caused by the earthquake, this topic is picked back up in Amos 9:1 when Yahweh says; “Smite the capitals so that the thresholds will shake, and break them on the heads of them all.” In view here is the non-sanctioned temple at Bethel, as suggested by Stuart¹² and others. The NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible explains how “The fifth and final vision depicts the destruction of a temple, most likely the chief sanctuary at Bethel (cf. 3:14; 5:5; 7:9,13). This was the primary place where the unacceptable national theology was celebrated and perpetuated.”¹³ Amos had already denounced Bethel in Amos 5:5-6.

The collapse of the sanctuary, caused by the earthquake, is so severe that it must be a judgment from Yahweh Himself:

The sanctuary is to collapse from top to bottom, from the dislodged capitals of the pillars to the loosened, shaky thresholds—a further sign that a divine act like an earthquake is in view rather than a military assault¹⁴. Capitals and thresholds together signify the completeness of the destruction, nothing survives from roof to floor....¹⁵

Stuart echoes Hubbard; “Pillars were major, visible support/decorative features of all iron age temples...and their destruction indicated full-scale demolition...Together, pillar top and threshold indicate a ‘top to bottom’ destruction.”¹⁶ Stuart continues: “Yahweh Himself initiates the demolition of Israel, starting at a sanctuary that He orders razed as a symbol of His rejection of Israel’s cultus.”¹⁷

¹² Stuart, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 391

¹³ Carson, *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, Note on Amos 9:1-10

¹⁴ Scholars like John Walton suggest that this destruction is caused by the Assyrian army, but as Hubbard argues, a top-to-bottom collapse indicates something else is in view, like a divinely executed earthquake.

¹⁵ Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 229

¹⁶ Stuart, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 391

¹⁷ Stuart, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 394

Thus, there is a connection between the earthquake of Amos 1:1 and the destruction of the non-sanctioned temple of Bethel in Amos 9:1. Not only has Yahweh sent “fire on the walls” and “consumed the citadels” of the pagan nations, but He has also destroyed Bethel’s sanctuary. Much has been torn down as a result of this earthquake, all of it symbolic of false religion.

This brings the reader to Amos 9:11. Hubbard comments on the startling change of tone: “The transition from verse 10 to verse 11 is the most abrupt and surprising in the entire book. The sword of judgment gives way to the trowel of reconstruction.”¹⁸ In the context of walls on fire, citadels being consumed, and sanctuaries collapsing, Yahweh intends to “raise up the fallen booth of David” (Amos 9:11). After tearing down the locus of false religious practices, Yahweh intends to raise up and rebuild one thing—David’s booth.

The phrase “In that day...” in verse 11 is likely a reference to the “Day of the Lord”. To the Hebrews, the Day of the Lord was a day of reckoning, a day of judgment on the wicked and vindication for the righteous or oppressed. The Day of the Lord is also a day of comparison and contrast—a day where things are made right, where things that have been out of order are brought back into order. Yahweh intends to restore orderly worship by raising up the fallen booth of David. Yahweh’s plan is to return to a model of worship that predates not only the non-sanctioned temples in Bethel and Dan but even the Temple of Solomon. Evidently, Yahweh would rather be worshiped rightly in a tent than wrongly in an ornate sanctuary.

If, as was previously suggested, the booth of David was a place of continual worship with music, sacrifices, and prophesy, centered around God’s presence in/on the Ark, Yahweh intends to restore Israel’s worship to this model, in contrast with what they have come to know. The result of the booth being raised is that Israel would obtain Edom and “all the nations who are called by My name” (Amos 9:12) as a possession and an inheritance.

¹⁸ Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 236

How Did the Apostles understand the Booth of David?

The words of the Apostle James at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 provide another reference point in developing an understanding of the booth of David. This gathering of the apostles is precipitated by a theological and social crisis; should gentiles be included in the church and if so what is required of them?

Previously it had been suggested that gentiles would not be included in the church unless they had been circumcised (Acts 15:1, 5) according to the law of Moses. Peter makes an argument for the inclusion of the gentiles based on the fact that gentile believers in Jesus had received the same Holy Spirit upon their conversion as the (Jewish) apostles had when they came to Christ (Acts 15:8). Peter concludes that God “made no distinction” between Jew and gentile who had put their trust in Christ.

After Peter appeals to an experiential reality, James appeals to a scriptural principle, the words of Amos that foretold of the inclusion of the gentiles as those who “seek the Lord” and are “called by [His] name” (Acts 15:17). C. Peter Wagner summarizes this point: “The major point James is attempting to make by citing this prophecy is that the notion of God’s bringing Gentiles into the kingdom as His people was part of His long-range plan, not some precipitous change of plans...”¹⁹ To include the gentiles was always part of God’s plan (dating even back to Abraham, Gen 12:3) and it has been made plain through the prophets, namely Amos.

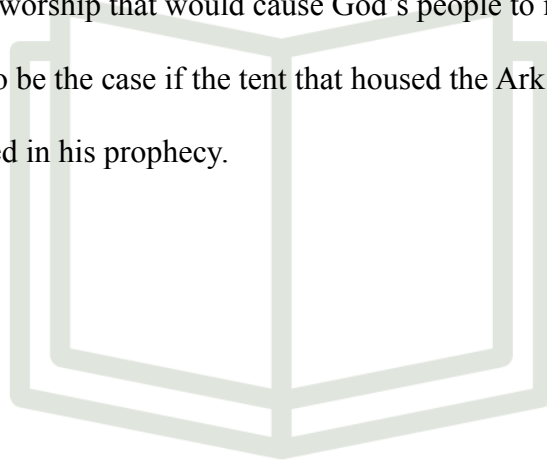
Whether it is Luke or James himself that uses the LXX version of the Amos 9:11 prophecy, the connection between the restoration of the “tabernacle of David” (NASB) and the inclusion of the gentiles remains constant between Amos 9:11-12 and Acts 15:16-17. The tabernacle/booth of David is restored so that gentile nations can seek the Lord. The Evangelical

¹⁹ C. Peter Wagner, *The Book of Acts: A Commentary*. (Ventura, CA: Regal. 2008). 336

Dictionary of Theology suggests the nature of this connection; “it is possible that the book of Acts refers to the church as the new temple (Acts 15:13-18)....”²⁰

Conclusion

If the booth of David in Amos 9:11 is referring to the literal tent that David erected to house the Ark, then perhaps its metaphorical or prophetic fulfillment may have something to do with the Davidic worship that filled the booth (in contrast with the Mosaic system or the false religion of Amos’ day). Could both Amos and the Apostles be calling people back to perpetual, presence-based, prophetic worship that would cause God’s people to inherit the people of the earth? This seems likely to be the case if the tent that housed the Ark is the fallen booth of David that Amos referenced in his prophecy.



²⁰ Walter A. Elwell, ed, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, 2nd Ed.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006). 1167

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