

Rejoinder to Rodney J. Decker's Response
Dispensational Study Group—ETS—2006

W. Edward Glenny

It is good to have someone interact with my work, and for that I thank you Rodney. Because of our shortness of time I will get right to my comments.

I wrote this paper to discuss the hermeneutics and the theology of the Jerusalem Council, as evidenced in Acts 15. The paper was not written to promote a Progressive Dispensational (PD) perspective, and some things I propose in this study may not be acceptable to a PD or Traditional Dispensational (TD) interpreters of the passage. I have interacted with different interpretations of the passage that I thought would be of interest to and helpful for this study group.

In my response and clarification I will not take time to discuss Rodney's questions concerning my treatment of the variations between the LXX and MT, since in n. 6 he says my conclusions concerning his concerns in this regard "will generally withstand scrutiny." (The same with his discussion of "deliberative alternative readings" on pp. 13-15; see his n. 45 and 63.)

I would like to address a few other minor points. Rodney contends that I am wrong in saying that in LXX Amos 9:11 the reason the nations seek the Lord is because his name is called upon them. I write two sentences after this statement that having "his name 'called upon them' suggests in the LXX that they have been chosen to be his covenant people." Thus I am suggesting the theological and logical reason they seek the Lord is because his name has been called upon them. Rodney seems to be confusing God's purpose in raising up the tent with the reason the Gentiles seek the Lord, which are

two different things. My point is that in the LXX the nations seek the Lord willingly, whereas in MT they are apparently subdued militarily. I would not, nor did I in my paper, argue with his contention that the same group could be in view in both texts.

Rodney questions my method of argumentation on p. 27, where I argue against a certain view of David's fallen tent because that view is "foreign to the rest of the NT." In this section I am considering the meaning of this phrase in Acts 15, that is the NT, and so is Strauss whom I am summarizing. (Strauss says, the key is "how does Luke understand the phrase.") Rodney concedes that perhaps I am talking about the NT text, and then wonders, "why we don't interpret the figure in its OT context. [?]" He goes on to say he hopes this does not imply a NT-priority view on my part. But I would like to ask him the opposite. Why should I be using the OT contextual meaning as the main determiner of the meaning of the NT context (to the disregard of the meaning in the NT), if I am studying the NT text and if both texts are to be given equal weight? Or, is he tipping his hand here about which text he gives priority?

Next, Rodney questions the "intricate exegesis" I propose as the basis of the Apostolic Decree. Here I should explain that I believe what we have in Acts 15 is an abbreviated summary of the discussion and reasoning that was behind the decisions at the Jerusalem Council. I believe the decisions of the Council, as reflected in Acts, was made in a Jewish context (i.e., it does not originate with Luke or the Hellenistic church), and I am not surprised to find Jewish hermeneutical technique employed in the exegesis at the Council. I have no reason to limit the discussion that went on there to LXX texts, and thus I see no contradiction in proposing a LXX text as the basis of the decision concerning circumcision and a Hebrew text as the basis of the Decree. I would add that I

am open to Rodney's suggestions, if he has a better idea of the reasoning behind the Apostolic Decree.

Rodney also claims that my explanation of the Decree contradicts the fact that the Mosaic Law is not binding on Christians; but here I would argue that we must distinguish between the law as covenant (which is now defunct, as he states) and the Law as Scripture, which still has authority (Mt. 5:17-18; esp. Rom. 3:21). I am afraid he is not doing that. Even though followers of Jesus are not under the law as a covenant arrangement, the OT Scriptures were the basis of the preaching of the early Church, and the basis of the decisions made at the Council in Acts 15, whether concerning circumcision or the Decree. The OT, interpreted in light of the Christ events, was the basis for the Church's belief and message and still has authority today. Under the New Covenant the Law does not lose its validity as Scripture, in fact it is to be written on our hearts. Thus, where else would the Council turn to make an authoritative decision concerning the Decree?

Rodney next asks "when" the Davidic dynasty will be re-established? He suggests an already/not yet explanation fails here on two counts. First, he questions whether Jesus being seated on the throne of David would provoke the Gentiles to seek God and thus produce the resulting response of Gentiles described in Acts 15:17 (i.e., seeking the Lord). I would answer that the passage says nothing about provoking the Gentiles to jealousy; rather the purpose of the restoration of the Davidic kingdom/dynasty is so that the Davidic Messiah, who is also Lord (Acts 2:36), may give the Spirit to all those who are called from among all peoples so they are able come to God through him. (I will develop this idea more fully in a moment.) Second he argues that the text (MT and LXX)

explicitly says that the Davidic dynasty must be restored “as in former times,” and this would not be fulfilled or true with Christ on the throne of David today. Here I want to emphasize that the book of Acts leaves out the phrase “as in former times,” and thus apparently this was not an important point in the discussion at the Council. It should also be noted that the adverb “as” (καθώς), in the phrase “as former times,” does not have to mean “correspond exactly” (e.g., John 20:21). (It can mean “to the degree that” or “in so far as” BDAG; note the use in 15:14.) Thus, Rodney’s argument that Acts could not refer to a reestablishment of the Davidic rule in Christ in this age is not convincing.

He next questions whether the quotation in Acts 15:16-18 is indeed a conflate text. This seems to be a minor issue with little effect on our differences, but I would argue for a conflation to explain the unique character of the quotation on at least three counts. First the textual evidence, which is substantial, especially the repetition of Gentiles (*ethne*) in most of the passages I suggested, supports the possibility of such a connection of these texts. Second, the introductory formula in Acts 15, “the words (pl) of the prophets (pl) agree,” is not a normal way to refer to “the Prophets” as a body of literature; it seems most naturally to understand it as a reference to more than one of the prophets. And third, such confluents of OT texts are seen continually in the NT (Mk. 1:2-3; Mt. 11:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:6-8; Rom. 9: 33) and the LXX. If one looks closely at the text quoted in Acts 15:16-18, it is clear it differs in many ways from the LXX, and the context in Acts suggests there was much discussion concerning Scripture involved in the decision of the Council. A conflation seems to me to be the most likely explanation of the evidence.

David Instone Brewer writes,

“One exegetical technique is common to the LXX, targumim, Samaritan Pentateuch, and 1QIs.a, and is variously called ‘amplification’ (Z. Frankel 1841) ‘complementation’ (Churgin 1928), ‘harmonisation’ (P. W. Skehan 1957), ‘haggadic retelling’ (S. Sandmel 1961), ‘expansionism’ (Skehan 1965), ‘analogy’ (J. Koenig 1982 ...) and ‘anaphoric translation’ (H. Heater 1982). This technique copies a portion of scripture from one location into another where a similar vocabulary or subject matter provides a link, and therefore appears to be related to the later method of Gezerah Shavah. Skehan is probably correct in seeing behind this method a high regard for the sacred text which means that Scripture can only be interpreted by utilizing other Scripture” (pp. 180-1, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE*).

A theologically and exegetically based conflation of related OT texts is consistent with the exegetical practices of both the LXX translators and the NT authors, and does have support from the text of Acts 15.

On the more substantive issue of my argument that the Messiah and his kingdom will evidence the work of the Spirit, Rodney argues that the Spirit alone is not distinctive for this—i.e., the Spirit has been active in all eras. This however misses the clear teaching of the NT in John 7:37-39 (“for the Spirit was not yet; for Jesus was not yet glorified”; see also Acts 19:1-3 (“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?...No we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit...”), and Matthew 12:28. The NT clearly connects the Spirit with the new age that begins with the Messiah, Jesus. In this regard I would emphasize that the baptism of the Spirit, which John promises will distinguish and identify the Messiah (Luke 3:16-17), takes place on the Day of Pentecost and later at the “Gentile Pentecost” at Cornelius’ house (Acts 1:6; 11; 15). This is a promise for Israel through the New Covenant that is now given to Jews and Gentiles; it is a sign that a new age has come; it is an eschatological event, and has salvation-historical significance,

pointing to entrance into the New Covenant era. In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul describes his new covenant ministry as characterized by the Spirit, not by the letter or the Law.

I wish Rodney had interacted with the main text I used to demonstrate Davidic fulfillment. (He writes, “there are no Davidic Covenant texts that are nearly so explicit or clear as those regarding the New Covenant in relation to the church,” and does not interact with the main one I mention in support. There are others that I could mention also.) I endeavor to establish the basis of Davidic fulfillment in the church in a footnote, and I will quote the footnote (97) for you. (The footnote was not read at the presentation at ETS.)

The fact that Davidic promise is fulfilled in the resurrection/ascension/exaltation of Jesus is seen most clearly in Acts 13:32-37 (see also 13:22-23). The Acts 13 context states that the promises to the fathers have been fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus (32-33); then it quotes Psalm 2 referring to the covenant relationship of the Davidic king and the Lord, established at the time of the king’s installation into office (Ps. 2:7 in Acts 13:34). This is connected with Jesus’ resurrection, and the “blessings promised to David (Isa. 55:3 in Acts 13:34); then all of this is explained as fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus to fulfill the promises given to David (Ps. 16:10 in Acts 13:35-37). Basic to the fulfillment that this passage is referring to is the promise of one to sit and rule on David’s throne forever (2 Sam. 7). The reference to Ps. 16:10 in Acts 13 connects the argument with Acts 2:22-36.

John 7:37-39 is very important here; in that Johannine context Jesus teaches that the Spirit, which is going to be given to believers in Jesus in abundance, was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (Furthermore in that context the Spirit, which Jesus is going to give, is a sign or proof that he is the Messiah.) I emphasize that it is the resurrection/exaltation/ascension of the Spirit-anointed-Messiah to the right hand of God as Lord and Christ that is the means for the pouring out of the Spirit promised in the New covenant on all who are related to this Davidic Messiah through the New covenant (Acts 2; John 7:37-39). Thus, the Davidic and New covenants are both part of one covenant

program (that is all mediated by Christ through the New covenant). The New cannot be inaugurated without the Davidic. In Acts 15 the Council connects their decision with the baptism of the Spirit described earlier in Acts and in the ministries of the Apostles and understands the salvation of Gentiles in terms of their incorporation into these covenant promises God made to Israel. And that is why in my paper I describe the salvation of Gentiles as “a Gentile incorporation into a renewed Israel.”

Finally, let me respond to Rodney’s arguments that the use of Amos 9 in Acts 15 is analogy and not fulfillment. Here I have five brief points to make. First, he is correct, I do acknowledge and find analogy in my study of the OT in 1 Peter, but he does not discuss my definition of analogy. I limit it to non-prophetic texts, which teach moral truths (p. 65 of my dissertation, “The Hermeneutics of the Use of the Old Testament in 1 Peter”), and thus my understanding of it is quite different from Rodney’s and does not fit the quotation from Amos in Acts 15. Second he qualifies his use of this terminology (i.e., analogy) and uses it to describe an analogous work of God at two different times with the same people (i.e., Gentiles). (It is normally used to describe an analogous situation with regard to two different referents, i.e., Israel and the Church.) Third, I am not sure that he would really want to argue for the analogy he suggests; some TDs would not want to do so. Traditionally dispensationalists have not understood Gentiles to be equal to Israel in the Millennium (p. 29, Moulton says “Gentiles will be allowed in the Millennium”); TDs have argued for a difference between Israel and the Church in the Kingdom, following the pattern of the OT period, and the argument in Acts 15 is for equality (n. 115). Fourth, one wonders why James would have included Amos 9:11 if we have an analogous use of Amos in Acts 15? Amos 9:12 or any other number of OT verses would have supported

Gentile salvation, if James was simply trying to show it was possible for Gentiles to be saved without any fulfillment of OT promise. Fifth and finally, as Walter Kaiser argues, the TD interpretation (analogy) of Acts 15 leaves the OT citation from Amos having no direct bearing on the question at stake at the Jerusalem Council, and this interpretation yields the hermeneutical edge Dispensationalism claims in its call for a literal, grammatical, or natural interpretation of Scripture (pp. 33-34).

We could talk go farther in talking about whether prophecy can be changed or reinterpreted in its fulfillment in the NT (pp. 10-11). I would point to prophecies like Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23; Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15; Psalms 2:1-2 in Acts 4:25-26 as a few of the more well known examples of this. There are several issues involved here that are the basis for such a deeper or fuller meaning of the text in the NT context. Among the factors involved are typology (pattern of fulfillment), progression of revelation and canonical development, fulfillment of the OT in Christ, mystery (Rom. 16:25-26), etc. This topic goes far beyond my time for this rejoinder. Again, thank you Rodney for your serious interaction with my paper. I appreciate having someone critique it.