

## Acts 11 - John Karmelich

1. I have titled Chapter 11 "Reacting to Change".
  - a) Significant changes in life are a scary thing.
    - i) The older we get, the more we accept things the way they are, or the way we have been taught, or the way we have been raised.
    - ii) By the time you are an adult for a good while, you probably have a pretty good idea about "the way the world works".
  - b) In the business world, there is an expression called "inserting a monkey wrench in the machine. It literally refers to throwing a wrench into a machine to make things go wrong. We use the expression to describe when somebody wants to make a dramatic change to the status quo.
    - i) In Chapter 11 God "puts a monkey wrench" in the Christian Jewish's beliefs.
  - c) For centuries, Jews believed that the only way to salvation was through Judaism.
    - i) In a sense they were right. There were Gentiles saved in the Old Testament, but it was usually after they realized that the "God of the Israelites is *the* true God".
      - a) I will add they (Gentiles living in the times of the Old Testament) were saved once they *act* on that faith.
      - b) Examples include Rehab the Harlot from Joshua Chapter 2.
      - c) Even King Nebuchadnezzar from the book of Daniel. I believe he was saved because he acknowledged that "Daniel's God is the "God of God's" in Daniel 4.
      - d) On the other hand, in Exodus, Pharaoh's magicians realized that the plagues were done "by the finger of God", (Exodus 8:19) but never did anything to respond to that God, and thus, are not saved.
2. But now, beginning in Chapters 10 and 11, we have the Gospel opened to the Gentile world.
  - a) To a Jew, this had to be a difficult thing to accept.
  - b) Think of the underlying implications:
    - i) What about all the laws we have been keeping for a thousand years. Do we now just throw it all away?
    - ii) What about the foods we eat and can't eat? Do we stop?
    - iii) What about our Jewish holidays? Do we stop celebrating them?
    - iv) When we get to Chapter 15, I'm going to take on a few of these questions.
  - c) The point for *this* chapter, for you and me is:
    - i) How do we *deal* with change?
    - ii) How do we deal with conflict when those changes occur?
  - d) It took a vision from God to get Peter to change his beliefs. Sometimes God works in dramatic fashion in order for those events to take place.
    - i) It was important that God worked through Peter on this, and not Paul. Peter was the leader of the church in Jerusalem at this time. Paul did not have the trust/respect, nor the "awe" of Peter at this time.
  - e) When Peter has to confront others on this change, notice he explained *how God worked through him*, not how *Peter* worked. The greatest evidence is a changed life. If people can see the change God has made in your lives, it is the greatest testimony you can have.

3. The last part of this chapter focuses on the Apostles sending ministers to Antioch.
  - a) Antioch was the first city where a large number of Gentiles became Christians.
    - i) The church leadership sent people to help these Gentiles grow in their faith.
    - ii) That is an important part of Christian ministry. Accepting Jesus is only the beginning of Christian faith. Ministry is not just conversion, it is about helping people *grow* in the faith.
    - iii) Without over-inflating my ego too much, ☺ I believe that's what God called me to do through this writing ministry. One of my favorite scriptures is as follows:
      - a) "Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning." (Proverbs 9:9 NIV).
      - b) That is what was going on in the last part of Chapter 11.
4. Last thing before we start. Remember in Acts, Chapter 1, Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8b, NIV)
  - a) Chapter 11 is the beginning of "the ends of the earth". The bringing of the Gospel message to those completely outside of Judaism.
    - i) I'm sure when Jesus said that, the disciples thought, "Well, he must mean the Jews scattered all over the world". Only in this chapter, it begins to dawn on them what Jesus meant by that.
5. With that said, let's start on Chapter 11. Verse 1: The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.
  - a) Word spread around even before Peter got back to Jerusalem.
  - b) Even before the days of telephones, letters and e-mail, nothing spreads faster than good rumors and unusual stories! (What do you think people did for entertainment?)
    - i) Can't you just picture people saying:
      - a) "Did you hear the news?"
      - b) "No, what"
      - c) "Sit down, you're not going to believe it."
      - d) Did you hear that Peter sat down and ate with a Gentile"
      - e) "Get out of here! A Gentile?"
      - f) "Wait, there's more! The Gentile was a Roman soldier! Can you believe it, a Roman soldier! A Centurion, no less!"
      - g) "Wait, there's even more! The Centurion accepted Jesus! Him and his whole family! A gentile is now a Christian, and without even being circumcised". Is that possible? What do you make of this? Oy vey! ☺
      - h) And it goes on from there! The story spread faster than wildfire!
    - c) There are a number of places in the Bible where it mentions Jesus reputation spread "all through Judea". I'm sure that same communication method as word spread about Jesus' miracles.
6. Verse 2: So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him <sup>3</sup> and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."
  - a) And so it begins. On and off for the next few chapters, we are going to deal with Jewish believers who cannot accept the idea of somebody becoming a Christian without becoming a Jew first. When we get to Chapter 15, we're going to talk more about the "specifics" of the issue. In that Chapter, the apostles and leaders settle the issue.
    - i) In Paul's letter to the Galatians, this is one of the key issues.

- ii) The focus of that letter is that after people get converted, some people from Jerusalem come to them and insist they be circumcised. To a Jew, circumcision is physical evidence that you have accepted Judaism.
    - a) There is a modern application to this. Parts of Galatians, and these verses here in Acts are talking about people who want to take you "one step further than God's grace".
    - b) There are always people who insist that if you want to get "really saved", or you want to get "really spiritual", you need to do "x, y and z" over and above accepting Jesus. This is adding "works" to your salvation. That is a modern example of those who insist on "circumcision".
    - c) I think it's important for Christians every now and then to do a self-check list to see what we are "counting on" for our salvation.
      - (1) Are we trying to justify ourselves by
        - (a) "Our regular Bible Study"?
        - (b) "Our church attendance"
        - (c) The fact we haven't committed our favorite sin all week?
        - (d) We all need to fill in our own blanks every now & then.
  - iii) Why am I getting into all this? Because that is what this verse is all about. It is about "legalism". The Jews were trusting in their "Jesus AND Judaism" for their salvation. They couldn't fathom otherwise.
  - iv) Notice Luke (the author) does not even dignify these people by calling them Jews. He just calls them "the circumcised".
    - a) I further suspect that this was not the 100% opinion of the group. There were probably some ringleaders who approached Peter on this.
    - b) Going back to Chapter 5, when Ananias and his wife Sapphira died-on-the-spot when they lied to Peter about their donations.
      - (1) That memory had to be on their minds when approaching Peter.
        - (a) "Gee Peter, we hate to criticize you, but about this Gentile thing, you sure you got that vision right?" ☺
        - (b) Either that, or they were so ingrained in their beliefs, they approached Peter in a rage.
7. Verse 4, Peter's response: Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: <sup>5</sup> "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. <sup>6</sup> I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. <sup>7</sup> Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'
- a) Notice Peter did not say, "Hey, I'm Peter, Jesus' main-man, if I say it's ok to preach to the Gentiles, then it's ok! Deal with it!" ☺
    - i) Peter told how *God* worked through his life.
    - ii) Peter recounted in these verses the vision as described in Chapter 10.
8. Peter continues, Verse 8: "I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'
- a) Again, like last chapter, the "oxymoron" of "Not so, Lord".
    - i) An oxymoron is a contradictory statement, like "Jumbo Shrimp".
    - ii) To repeat a quote I gave last week:
      - a) You can say 'Lord' and you can say 'Not so', but you can't say "Not So Lord". (W. Graham Scroggie)

- b) With Peter recounting this way, he is stating his familiarity with the "food laws" of Leviticus. He also "justifies himself" by stating how "I" have never violated those laws.
    - i) This is a good, simple example of "legalism". This is a negative Christian term that when people try to justify themselves over the grace of God.
9. Verse 9: "The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'
- a) Getting off topic a little, this verse "hit me like a ton of bricks" this week.
    - i) The part that says "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."
    - ii) When I was studying this verse, I was personally angry several members of my church. Although I believed they were saved, I believed they were wrong in a certain situation, and I let them know it! ☺
    - iii) That anger, was interrupting my peace with God. As I laid in bed one night, I was re-reading Acts Chapter 11, and this verse hit me in a new way:
      - a) Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.'
      - b) That "anything" is not about food, it is about people!
      - c) As we learned in Chapter 10, this verse is about Gentiles being "made clean" by the blood of Jesus.
        - (1) The lesson I learned was, even though I still believe this group of people sinned in a particular action, God had made them "clean". I need to keep that in mind in further dealings with them.
        - (2) The epilogue of that story is that it helped to bring "closure" to the situation. I lovingly laid out my opinion on the situation, told them I was not angry at them, etc., and then, I let it go. It was up to God at that point to deal with the situation. I am not the "sin police", and neither is any other Christian.
        - (3) The Bible has a method with dealing with sins among friends. It is laid out in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy Chapter 5. My attempt to deal with that situation followed along that guideline.
10. Verse 10: This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again. <sup>11</sup>Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying.
- a) Peter is specifically mentioning the "three times" to tie in with the "3 men" who show up in the next verse.
  - b) This verse is a good example of never taking a Scripture out of context.
    - i) The next verse makes it clear that the "3 times" refers to the "3 men."
    - ii) Reading the verse about "the great sheet" *by itself*, one can come up with all sorts of weird interpretations. Always use the Bible to interpret the Bible. If the Bible *clearly* says what the verse means, that *is* the interpretation.
    - iii) To quote an old Biblical saying
      - a) "A text taken out of *context* becomes a *pretext*".
11. Verse 12: "The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man's house.
- a) One of the smartest things Peter did was take along witnesses.
    - i) It is one thing for you to tell a story and expect others to believe it.
      - a) When there are a number of people standing next to you, shaking their heads in agreement, it adds to the credibility of your story.

- ii) This method is Biblical: "One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." (Deuteronomy 19:15 NIV)
    - a) If you know you are going to be in a controversial situation, take along outside witnesses.
- 12. Verse 13, Peter continues: He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. <sup>14</sup> He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.'
  - a) It is one thing to say a religious Jew saw an angel.
    - i) It was probably quite another for a Gentile to see an angel.
  - b) This was not clear in Chapter 10, but it is here. A purpose (not *the* purpose) for sending an Angel to the Roman Centurion was for Peter's and the Jewish/ Christians sake, to help support the validation that God can speak to the Gentile.
  - c) "You and your household" will be saved.
    - i) One important point in Christian theology is that salvation is an individual thing. One cannot be saved for somebody else.
    - ii) Remember that the household was *present* when Peter gave his sermon.
      - a) There is a verse later in Acts (Acts 16:31) where Paul tells someone "you and your household" will be saved, and only one person is present.
        - (1) There is an explanation for Acts 16:31.
        - (2) "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. ☺"
- 13. Verse 15: As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup> Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>17</sup> So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?"
  - a) Remember from last week that the Holy Spirit interrupted Peter's Sermon
    - i) Peter never made it to the "alter call".
  - b) People started speaking in tongues in the middle of Peter's sermon. Why?
    - i) Part of it was to keep Peter's ego in check. God does the work, not Peter (nor your pastor, teacher, etc.!).
    - ii) In a similar argument, it showed Peter that it is God who initiated salvation through the Gentiles, not some "great speech" Peter gave.
    - iii) This method *added to the validation of Peter's story* as it was told to the others.
  - c) "Verse 15 said the "Holy Spirit came on them...as it came on us".
    - i) What did Peter mean by that?
    - ii) How did Peter know for sure?
    - iii) The answer was "tongues". I don't know if "tongues of fire" were visible in the room as they were in Acts Chapter 2, it is not stated one way or the other in the text. What *is* stated in Verse 17 is that the Gentiles "spoke in tongues".
      - a) To refresh your memory, this is a supernatural gift to be able to praise God in a foreign language. One that you cannot speak on your own.
    - iv) That supernatural gift was enough evidence to convince Peter they were saved.
    - v) Some Pentecostal churches use this verse to argue that "evidence" of being saved is the gift of tongues. To me, that is nonsense.
      - a) The evidence to me is not whether you can praise God in a foreign language. The evidence is *a changed lifestyle*. A lifestyle that *lives* by the promises made to us in the Bible. You are not *saved* by your deeds, but your deeds are *evidence* that you believe those Biblical promises.

14. And now, the jury has reached a "verdict", verse 18: When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."
  - a) As I mentioned in my introduction, this was a difficult thing to accept. Years of man-made knowledge, prejudice, and "big ego's" made Jews think they were superior *in nature* to Gentiles. It took an act of God to change that way of thinking.
    - i) There are a lot of implications to this, many of which probably have not sunk in yet. For example, does this mean Gentiles don't have to be circumcised, or celebrate Passover, etc. What about God's promises to the Nation of Israel.
    - ii) That is to be dealt with later. Right now, they are still trying to "digest" the fact that God can save a Gentile without going through Judaism.
    - iii) God works the same way in our pre-conceived ideas. He doesn't change us all at once, just a little at a time. He gives us as much information as we can handle, and then God waits for us to grow a little more.
      - a) Sometimes the "initial shock of change" takes a miracle. The remainder of our change usually comes slowly and gradually, as we mentally change our perceptions about ideas and people.
15. Verse 19: Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.<sup>20</sup> Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.<sup>21</sup> The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.
  - a) In Verse 19, we move on to a new topic, and that is the conversion of a whole group of Gentiles in the City of Antioch. The two sections of the chapter tie together because they both deal with Gentile conversion. The first section (up to verse 18) focuses on Peter and the leading Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. The rest focuses on a "Gentile movement" in the City of Antioch.
  - b) Antioch, at the time of this story was a major city of about 500,000.
    - i) It was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in the Roman Empire.
    - ii) It is located in Syria, which borders Israel to the north.
    - iii) About 540AD, the Persians conquered and destroyed ("sacked") this city. The modern city, today called "Antakiyeh" is only about 35,000.
      - a) (Source Expositor's Bible Encyclopedia).
    - iv) Antioch was also known for its major sports centers, entertainment and vices. Sort of an ancient "Las Vegas " (entertainment/vice) mixed in with lots of big sports attraction.
  - c) When you read this story, you get the impression, this was happening *at the same time* of Peter's dealing with the Roman Centurion and his family.
    - i) In other words, it was not like: "Hey, Peter said its ok to witness to the Gentiles, so what do you say we take a shot at it."
    - ii) It was probably more like "I know this is against our customs and belief's, but what do you say we just preach Jesus to the Gentiles, and see what happens."
  - d) Notice in this verse that the men who preached to the Antioch Gentiles are not named.
    - i) Remember Luke wrote Acts years after these events. In Luke 16, Luke uses the word "we" in reference to the fact he joined Paul on a missionary journey. The information in Acts prior to Chapter 16 was investigative research on Luke's part.

- a) Maybe he simply couldn't find the names of the people who started the Antioch gentile church.
  - b) Maybe The Holy Spirit "purposely" left them unnamed so the focus is on the "saved" Gentiles, and not the Christians who witnessed to them.
  - ii) Notice the "credit" for the Gentiles being saved goes to God (verse 21). That was possibly another reason why these missionaries were not named.
  - iii) All of this is a good attitude for us to remember. God knows who did the witnessing. The credit for the *change* in people's lives goes to, and only to God.
  - e) Remember the purpose of this chapter is to show the transition between God *just* working on Jews, and converts to Judaism and *now* God working directly on Gentiles.
    - i) God was working simultaneously on Peter, the leaders in Jerusalem, and at the same time those who were "scattered" because of Stephen's persecution were now being used by God in a great manner to open to the doors to the Gentiles.
- 16. Verse 22: News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.
  - a) Word travels fast, even without telephones, newspapers or television. I'm sure the news of Gentiles being converted to Christianity was a shock not only to the Jewish Christians, but to the Jews as well.
    - i) I'm sure by the time word of this reached back to Jerusalem, Peter's witness to the other leaders was already completed, and thus the action taken.
  - b) Notice the first thing the church leaders do. We must send "rep's" to go help them.
    - i) I'm sure if Peter's testimony was not done first, that same group would have sent rep's over with knives to go perform some circumcism's! ☺
    - ii) Now, with the attitude of acceptance of other races, and people being allowed to directly come to Christ, now the council just wants to send ministers.
  - c) This little section is a great model for the church itself.
    - i) When somebody becomes "saved" we should NEVER say:
      - a) "Well son, you've accepted Jesus, that's great, now have a good life." ☺
      - b) Christianity is designed to be a team effort.
        - (1) Once you've become saved, we work as a team, to encourage each other, to be held accountable to each other, to pray for one another, to help each other to learn more about Jesus.
    - ii) This is what happened in Verse 22. "They (church leaders) sent Barnabus to Antioch".
      - a) Not to investigate and report back, but to encourage them in their faith. Teach them more about Jesus. Teach them more about prayer. Encourage them to stay close together.
      - b) Remember that Antioch was a large city known for vices. The temptations to "bad alternatives" were close by (sound familiar?).
- 17. Verse 24 answers the question, why did they pick Barnabus: <sup>24</sup> He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.
  - a) Even before this chapter Barnabus had developed a good reputation.
    - i) Back in Chapter 4, Verse 36, he was noted among those who sold some real estate and gave the proceeds to the apostles.
    - ii) In Chapter 9, Verse 27, Barnabus introduced Saul (Paul) to the apostles at a point in time when the apostles were scared of Saul because of what he had done earlier.

- b) Let's look at Baranabus's qualifications:
    - i) 1. "He was a good man." His reputation preceded him. There's a quality all people need to strive for.
      - a) "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold." (Proverbs 22:1 NIV)
    - ii) 2. "Full of the Holy Spirit". This doesn't mean he had the gifts of tongues! It means he was born-again, and trusts God to lead him in his actions.
    - iii) 3. "Full of faith". To quote Ray Steadman on this verse and topic, "A man of faith simply believes God and expects them to act. He doesn't even think about how he feels himself."
      - a) To steal some old American cliché's, faith is "putting your money where your mouth is" in God, the Bible and what it says. You take the Bible *seriously*. You "walk the walk and talk the talk".
  - c) What good did Barnabus do?
    - i) Not *only* did he encouraged the believers that were there, but *more were added!*
    - ii) Was it because of Barnabus's qualifications? Partially, but I also see Barnabus's *work* through the existing believers that helped to grow the church.
      - a) There's a pattern for church growth you do see much in books and seminars! Get good faithful men (and women) to encourage the existing believers. Lead by example, teach them how to pray, lead them in a study of the Word, praise God as a group. Out of *that*, the church will *naturally* grow. People will see the joy and blessings that *naturally* flow when the Holy Spirit works through a body of believers, and the growth will occur "magically" without any outside marketing programs!
        - (1) I've seen my share of church advertising, and marketing growth. The *best* growth in churches today comes by word of mouth. Show me a Bible-based church, where they take prayer, praise and studying God's word *seriously*, and you'll see growth.
18. Verse 25: Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,<sup>26</sup> and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.
- a) There is nothing in the Bible against using the "God-given wisdom" God gave us, *unless God over-rides* that decision. That is what you see here.
    - i) Barnabus was thinking, "You know I have a Jewish background. In order to relate to these people, I need somebody who has a good understanding of Greek culture. Somebody who could relate to these people, and at the same time, have a good Biblical understanding. I know, I'll get Saul."
      - a) He didn't pray to God over "who should I get, (at least it's not stated in the text), he figured Saul was the right man for the job, and sought him.
  - b) Commentators estimate there is a long gap (up to 12 years!) between the last encounter with Saul (the big conversion) and Barnabus bringing Saul to Antioch.
    - i) We last left Saul back in Tarsus witnessing to people in that location.
  - c) In Verse 26 it states, "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch."
    - i) Most historians believe that when the word "Christian" was first word, it was meant as a derogatory statement, used as a put-down.
    - ii) The Antioch Christians on the other hand, liked the term, and used it.
    - iii) The acceptance of Christianity as a separate religion from Judaism also imposed a new risk. Judaism was an officially "tolerated" religion in the Roman Empire. Christianity was "not on the list". That could/did cause problems with Rome.

- iv) You'll find there are American Christian churches with the word "Antioch" in their title, especially in the Baptist denominations. It is a title of honor. In the same way Antioch was the home of the first Christian-gentile church, they borrow that title to show a new church being planted.
19. For the last 3 verses, we have a new little story, about Christian "prophets" coming from Jerusalem to Antioch. Verse 27-30: During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) <sup>29</sup> The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. <sup>30</sup> This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.
- a) First of all, let's talk about "Prophets and Prophecy".
    - i) Most of the time, "Prophecy" is simply taking about Jesus, his mission in life, his first and second coming. It is about explaining the implications of the Bible to people. My supporting verse:
      - a) "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Revelation 19:10b)
    - ii) With that said, there was also "prophecy", (the ability to predict the future) as a Spiritual gift, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Much of prophecy was about Jesus and deals with his first and second comings.
    - iii) But there is also prophecy of historical events. Why?
      - a) Part of it was to validate *those prophets* and the Bible as the word of God.
      - b) One way we can validate that the Bible *and the Bible alone* is the word of God is that it is full of prophecies (predictions) made years before the events themselves took place.
        - (1) Often prophecies have "double fulfillment", a short-term fulfillment to validate the prophet, and a long-term fulfillment that usually has to do with Jesus.
        - (2) J. Vernon McGee refers to it as (paraphrase) "looking at a mountain range in the distance, but not seeing a great valley in-between that vision of the mountains".
    - iv) Prophecy is listed as "a" gift one can receive by the Holy Spirit. Prophecy is *also* a "gift" that demonic spirits can receive.
      - a) "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1 NIV)
      - b) There is a very similar argument in Deuteronomy 13:1-3 as this verse.
    - v) God calls on us to *test* prophecies to see whether they are of God or not. How do we tell? First, does it support or contradict the Bible? Is it honoring God, or the prophet who spoke it? 3<sup>rd</sup> (and only 3<sup>rd</sup>) did it actually come to pass?
    - vi) Last, how do we know when somebody is a prophet?
      - a) If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:22 NIV)
    - vii) And the punishment if the guy is a false prophet?
      - a) "But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death." (Deuteronomy 18:20 NIV)

- b) Meanwhile, let's get back to the text. We have these prophets coming down from Jerusalem. Given what I just stated about "testing" prophets, I'm sure their reputation as prophets *proceeded* them. There is nothing in the text about doubting their ability or their accuracy.
- c) Historians have validated this prophecy about the famine as true. A Roman historian who lived during this time commented on this event.
  - i) "Although there is no record of a single famine that ravaged the whole empire in the time of Claudius, various Roman historians referred to a series of bad harvests and famine conditions during his reign (cf. Suetonius *Vita Claudius* 18.2; Tacitus *Annales* 12.43; Dio Cassius *History of Rome* 60.11; Orosius *History* 7.6.17)". Bible Expositor Encyclopedia
  - ii) Remember that Luke wrote this text years after the event. He adds in the text the validation of this famine coming true during the reign of Roman Emperor Claudius.
- d) OK, the big question. Why did Luke include this whole section? I mean, here we are talking about Jews and Gentiles, the conversion of Gentiles and Christian-Jewish acceptance of that fact. Why talk about this famine and a fund-raiser for that famine?
  - i) I'm speculating here, so bear with me. Sometimes, it takes a major disaster to bring people together, who normally, wouldn't speak to each other. The instinct for survival is greater than built-in prejudices we have against each other. Working together, with people you normally would not associate with, helps to knock down those barriers.
  - ii) Does that mean God caused a famine? I can't say. I do believe God *allowed* the famine to happen, and more specifically to allow this *prophecy* to be told as to help people during this time.
    - a) I do believe there is a *purpose* when disasters occur. God's plans are much bigger than our plans. Living for eternity and helping people *prepare* for eternity has greater implications than our life here on earth. I can't explain why God allows some to live a long life, and others are taken sooner. I simply walk by faith that God is a God-of-love, and His purposes are greater than our purposes, even though we don't understand his purpose.
    - b) God never promised Christians that believing in Him would cause us to *avoid* pains and trouble. God promises to comfort us *through* these tough times if we keep our focus and trust in Him.
- e) Back to the verse, there is another implication here. Remember the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabus to the Antioch church *to help them!* Now, here is the church in Antioch helping the "mother church" in Jerusalem!

20. OK, wrapped up in 10 pages! (It's much easier when there are only 30 verses in a chapter!)

21. Let's Pray: Father, we thank you for opening up the door to us Gentiles, as to make a way for our salvation. We are thankful, for the Old Testament Jewish believers, who were your faithful servants in preserving your word and making a path for Jesus to come into the world. In the same light as we have learned in this chapter, open up the barriers and prejudices that are in *our* heart. Help us not to call "unclean" what you have cleansed. Help us to work as a "body", in a unison with other believers for the further growth of your kingdom. May your will be done at all times. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.