

## Acts 11 - John Karmelich

Let me open with a thought that occurred to me as I was studying this chapter. I remember many years ago learning: Real change takes moments but the "cleanup operation" takes a long time! What usually occurs in life is the "cleanup operation" starts with the fact that sometimes we are so busy dealing with a situation all we can do is make the best decisions we can in that moment. The fallout of a situation is what usually takes a lot of time to explain and digest. That's what we've got in this chapter. The focus is on the early church (Jewish-Christians) dealing with the great change that occurred when the Gospel was first preached to non-Jewish people. The underlying issue of this chapter is to help us deal with the "fall out" of significant change in our lives.

You might say, hey I already know how to deal with that. We do our best to explain our role in a given situation and if people believe it or not, it's their business. Christianity doesn't work that way. Realize that Jesus commanded us to spread the word about Him to all nations. It doesn't just include our group or those we want to be part of our group, but even those we aren't comfortable being around! It means lessons on dealing with change is important. That's why we get a whole chapter focusing on two events that focus on change: The first is Peter explaining to his fellow Jewish-Christians, how and why he did share the gospel message with non-Jewish people (a Roman soldier and his family/friends). Then there is a second story of Jewish Christians telling others about Jesus in an area north of Israel. (What's Syria and Lebanon today.) The point of the chapter is about leading people from both Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds to Jesus. The stories aren't so much about the conversions as it is about the fact that non-Jewish people are being saved.

All of us know the Gospel message is for both those of Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds. If that is all we get from this chapter, we miss the point. The lessons here are dealing with the "fallout" of how God wants us to work in the world and dealing with other believers after God worked in our lives in a way that well let's just say only He can do. With that said, let me explain the details of this chapter.

To explain this chapter I should back up and remind us of what happened in Chapter 10. God arranged a bible study (literally). Peter got a heavenly vision of a big sheet full of animals which included those God forbid Jewish people to eat. God then told Peter "kill and eat". This vision occurred 3 times. Right after #3, three men showed up at Peter's door. They told him to go visit a Roman captain who wants to see him. At about the same time, God appeared in a vision to that Roman captain who was stationed in a town not far from where Peter was. God wanted Peter to travel to the soldier to teach him the Gospel message is for non-Jewish people as well. The underlying point is God was working hard through both of these men, and both were simply reacting and dealing with the situation without time to digest it all! All of that is from Chapter 10.

That leads to Chapter 11. At this point the bible study between Peter and the Roman along with others from "both camps" are done. I'm positive during all of Chapter 10, Peter was just reacting to what he's told to do and watching non-Jewish people get saved for the first time. Now he is back in Jerusalem as he was asked to explain this to the Jewish-Christians there. While there are no biblical laws about them associating with non-Jews, it became a custom and his fellow believers in Jesus wanted an explanation. That led to Peter repeating the story details of Chapter 10. It's not just repeated for emphasis, although I'm sure that's part of it. I'd argue the main reason this story got another mention was to teach us about dealing with the "fallout of changes to our ways of thinking!"

One of the commands Jesus gave via an illustration was "never to put new wine in old wineskins". This isn't about drinking wine but about the fact that wine expands and if put in an old animal skin, it'll leak. I remember one of my mentors teaching me years ago as a prayer, "Dear God help me to adjust to what is Your plan for the moment and not pour new wine in old wineskins." Preaching the Gospel message's not a thing that changes with time. However often the methods we use do change with time. Often the way we learn God's will is via trial and error. In this case, Peter was literally given a vision of animals he was forbidden to eat and told by God to kill and eat. It's not about changing his diet. One reason He gave the Israelites that special diet is to not act like everyone else. Saying all animals are now edible is just a way of saying the Gospel message is for non-Jewish people as well. The vision was given in the way Peter could figure out what God meant. So why didn't God just say, preach to Gentiles? Because it went against all that Peter was raised to believe so God did the "dramatic" for him.

That leads back to Chapter 11. Peter had to explain all of this to his fellow Jewish Christians. Yes the dramatic way it was done helped the others to believe and the fact that Peter took people along to see all of this supported that this is what God was doing. Bottom line the church accepted it, although the question of how to treat non-Jewish believers won't be fully resolved until Chapter 15. With that issue resolved, we can move on to the next story in this chapter.

The next story is about Jewish Christians spreading the word about Jesus to what's today Lebanon, and then to the large island of Cyprus (west of Lebanon, east of Greece). Then they go north to a major city at that time, Antioch, about 200 miles north of Jerusalem. Gives you an idea how far the church spread after the persecution started in Jerusalem! The key point is some of those travelers spoke to non-Jewish people and lead them to Jesus. Again the focus is on spreading the gospel message as the early church dealt with the change of the Gospel spreading to non-Jewish people.

The final part of the chapter talks about the church itself sending Barnabas (a nickname for him, which means encourager) to check it out. Since he traveled north and didn't know many believers in the area, he went looking for Paul. It's probably been a decade since Paul was first converted. Recall that when Paul first got saved God said he'd be His witness to Gentiles, Jewish and leaders. In effect it is time for Paul to start that process as none of his missionary journeys occurred yet. Anyway, Barnabas did find Paul and said to him in effect, "It's time for you to go around and preach Jesus as you were told to do!"

An interesting note is at this time the term "Christian" was born. It simply means "little Christ", one of His followers. For those who don't know the word Christ is in effect the Greek word for Messiah!

The last part of the chapter talks about prophets from Jerusalem who predicted a famine. That occurred in 45AD and confirmed through non-biblical sources. Remember the book of Acts covers decades. If Jesus rose from the dead in 32AD, we're now discussing the early "40's" for this part of the book. The reason that prediction is important is it gave a good reason for the Jewish and non-Jewish Christians to help each other prepare for this famine. Again it's an issue where a vision was given and now it has to be explained so people can deal with it!

OK John, let's assume we've never had a great vision from God. How do we apply this? All of us have had to deal with situations where things are happening so fast we just go with the moment. It's a "what happens next" situation that's the common issue of these stories. Again prior to this chapter, Peter had a vision, the early church got scattered and witnessed to people they didn't know. Notice those who made the best decisions realized how God was working! That's why Barnabas got Paul to get moving! That is also why the early church accepted Peter's conversion incident and the early church worked together to deal with the famine. I'm just saying what God starts, we need to digest and make the best decisions

possible once we see how He's working at any given moment. Hope all of that helps as together we use our lives for His glory!

On the same page where you downloaded this summary is a detailed lesson on Chapter 11. That is on a verse-by-verse basis. To read that, click on one of the other two links on this chapter. You're always welcome to e-mail me and I hope you like this. Thanks, John