

## Acts 11

### God's Big Picture for All Mankind Revisited

**Read Acts 11:1-18:** We are going over some major historic worldwide shifts in the Christian faith. God opened the door of evangelism to all nations. Jesus had done this already; but now it is becoming an unstoppable force (instead of just an open order). It is very possible that the church may not have had to have been persecuted if the saints went out from Jerusalem and took the gospel to the whole world. If the book of Acts is still being written, then this applies to me right now too. Did the Jewish apostles think that Jesus was only talking about discipling Jews living abroad?

*<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. (Matthew 28)*

The first 18 verses of this chapter are a retelling of what took place in chapter 10. Peter was the best apostle to bring this big news to the saints in Jerusalem. Peter was not expecting this Gentile salvation to happen. The saints in Jerusalem were also not expecting this news. In fact, they argued against it at first.

Doing things the same way for too long will eventually stagnate and become an empty practice, disassociated with the ultimate original purpose.

*To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth. ’ ” (Isaiah 49)*

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost seems like it must have happened just before all of these events in this chapter. Not so. Stephen was not martyred until 3-4 years after Pentecost. This chapter could have been 6-10 years after the famous Pentecost outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is fun to gather with the saints, but how long did the Pentecost pilgrims remain in Jerusalem? That was not the ultimate plan. Like a moth, we are drawn to the light and the fellowship of the saints. That is not the entirety of our roles on earth. We are to recharge and then bring this message elsewhere.

We are creatures of habit. It is helpful to manage our expectations. God is broadening and re-focusing on a more worldwide evangelism. The saints may have acknowledged the call to go out; but they were not forced to live it out yet. Change is always something that we naturally resist. Christianity is not just habitual like a rut that we can stay in forever. We are not driving the bus. Things are subject to change. Sometimes they have smooth transitions, sometimes they don't. It has always been this way since the beginning.

God started by reaching out to all men through Adam and Seth. The holy bloodline of Seth became corrupted when Cain's family and Seth's family intermarried, corrupting all mankind; and eventually requiring Noah's flood to salvage the last remnant of faith on earth (1,656 years

after beginning with Adam). God started all over again. Noah was the progenitor of all of the original 70 nations. After time, the whole world became corrupt again (252 years after the flood), especially after worldwide leadership began to centralize at the Tower of Babel. God had to set up checks and balances and national boundaries to reduce tyranny. Centralized human control has always led to problems. Every human solution has failed badly. That is why communism's failures are so ironic. The purpose is to eliminate greed and undue outside influence; and the opposite always takes place. Once again, the world had become decidedly lost to idol worship; when God called Abram (322 more years after the Tower of Babel). Abram's family were confused worshippers of the moon idol god (Allah) when God called him to leave all of that behind.

*<sup>2</sup> Joshua said to all the people, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. <sup>3</sup> But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, <sup>4</sup> and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his family went down to Egypt. (Joshua 24)*

*“You are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen, So that you may know and believe Me And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me. <sup>11</sup> “I, even I, am the LORD, And there is no savior besides Me. <sup>12</sup> “It is I who have declared and saved and proclaimed, And there was no strange god among you; So you are My witnesses,” declares the LORD, “And I am God. <sup>13</sup> “Even from eternity I am He, And there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?” (Isaiah 43)*

There is still an archaeological site in Ur of the Chaldees that has a ziggurat dedicated to the moon god. Abram was taken away from all of that to meet the real God. Nobody can say that Abram worshipped Allah after he met the real God. After leaving Ur of the Chaldees Abram stayed a while in Haran...which was also known for worship of the moon god. Once Abram's dad died, Abram left to meet the real God.



God used Abraham to re-start a nation who would serve as *caretakers and archivists* of scriptural history (Israel). Over time, faith in Israel was lost to empty rituals. Now all of the historic

prophecy and biblical writings recorded by the Hebrews had been archived and made ready for worldwide distribution. A common worldwide Greek language would facilitate that. This was probably the only time since the Tower of Babel that the whole world spoke the same language.

The big plan has always been for the children of Israel to take the good news to all nations. God does not follow a linear progression through history, partially because man follows a nonsensical path, resulting in some real dilemmas and work arounds. God is always 10 chess moves ahead.

The Holy Spirit does what he does. His plans are better than ours. Even as well-intentioned Christians we can become so *invested* into our committed path of travel. Being a Christian means that you need to prepare to have your plans changed. We are all creatures of habit. We are surrounded with issues because of not following God. We focus on the results of going our own ways that manifest themselves in insurrections, military conflicts, economic warfare and drug abuse. In reality, it is all the result of turning our back on the God of the bible. The more times I read the bible the clearer this becomes.

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD.*

*⁹ “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55)*

*For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against You, You only, have I sinned, (Psalm 51)*

What would happen if God began converting a bunch of rioting Democrat anti-establishment types with a different angle on the gospel? If it was legit, we would have to embrace it and be thankful for it. Similarly, God may have offended the mainstream church during the Jesus Movement of the 70's with hippies. We discovered that personal hygiene and other things were not the most-important factors.

God re-clarifies that it is his plan for men to be meat eaters. He tells Peter to get up and kill some wild game to eat. Peter's response of "No Lord" is an oxymoron. If he is your Lord you cannot say no. Otherwise, that gives you the ultimate veto power, making you your own Lord.

Technically, God began the gospel with the Gentiles, since Abram was actually the first Jew. It would have been helpful for the Jerusalem circumcised believers to consider what faith once looked like before God gave Moses the Law. Gentiles were largely idolators; which is why God separated his people from them. It was never a racial thing.

The Jews also took the concepts of the Mosaic Law and extrapolated all of the wrong things from the underlying intentions. Some simple Laws were not necessarily to be applied beyond their specific application. The Jews really went down a rabbit hole on over-enforcing numerous laws. For example, Moses told the people to not eat a kid boiled in its mother's milk. He never said that you could not have a meat and cheese platter. That original rule sounds like a mercy and kindness thing, plus it was a pagan practice with associated meanings. Abraham ate meat

and cheese on the same plate. Today Jews will not allow meat and cheese to touch the same plates. That is crazy!

### Local Applications to Prayer

Big things happen when believers pray. Zechariah prayed and Elizabeth became pregnant with John the Baptist. Hannah prayed and she became pregnant with Samuel. Daniel prayed, and God laid out the future world events and the coming messiah. Similarly, chapters 10 and 11 were also answered prayers. An angel clearly told Cornelius that his prayers were heard and answered. What were his prayers? What he was looking for came through Peter's message of salvation to Gentiles. Cornelius and his family prayed continually and they believed fervently. They took righteous action to meet the needs of those around them. They were actually filled with the Holy Spirit before they were baptized. Cornelius's family had all of the working pieces of faith in order, without the specific assurance of their inclusion and salvation. That was added here in this chapter. The Jews are also learning that faith is more than being good or loyal to a divine purpose and messianic concept.

This Gentile faith explosion is based on *righteousness by faith*. Not righteousness in keeping the Law and being circumcised. This same discovery is what Martin Luther discovered to begin the protestant faith movement.

*<sup>17</sup> (as it is written, “A father of many nations have I made you”) in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. <sup>18</sup> In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “So shall your descendants be.” <sup>19</sup> Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; <sup>20</sup> yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, <sup>21</sup> and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. <sup>22</sup> Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness. <sup>23</sup> Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, <sup>24</sup> but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup> He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification. (Romans 4)*

## Martin Luther’s Discovery of Justification by Faith

### The 95 Theses

In **1517**, Luther posted his **95 Theses** on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church, challenging the Catholic Church’s practices, particularly the sale of indulgences. He argued that salvation could not be purchased or earned through works, but was a gift from God received through faith.

## Core Beliefs

Luther emphasized several key beliefs:

- **Sola Fide:** Salvation comes through faith alone, rather than a combination of faith and works.
- **Sola Scriptura:** The Bible is the ultimate authority on spiritual matters, not church traditions or papal authority.
- **Priesthood of All Believers:** Every Christian has access to God and can interpret Scripture without mediators.

### Mediterranean Conversions

**Read Acts 11:19-21:** The gospel is spreading because of persecution and the resulting relocations. They are still focused on preaching to Jews. Jews tend to live a cloistered and separated life unto their own. The church began to grow immediately in Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Cypress and Libya. The further that you get away from Jerusalem, the more Hellenistic and Gentile-friendly the Jews become. Today, the gospel is still more fertile among foreign Jews than Israeli Jews (per capita). Approximately 45% of Jews worldwide live in Israel. Of the Messianic Israeli-born Jews, 70-75% are second-generation immigrants.

The demographics of Messianic Jews specifically within Israel highlight a mix of both Israeli-born individuals and those who are foreign-born. As of recent estimates:

DEMOGRAPHIC	PERCENTAGE
Israeli-born	Approximately 60%
Foreign-born	Approximately 40%

#### Breakdown

1. **Israeli-born (Sabras):**
  - A significant portion of Messianic Jews in Israel are born in the country, often part of families that have been part of the community for generations.
2. **Foreign-born:**
  - This group includes Jews who immigrated from various countries, including the United States, Europe, and the former Soviet Union, often coming to Israel in connection with their faith or as part of their family return to Jewish roots.

#### Context

- The overall Messianic Jewish population in Israel is estimated to be about 30,000 individuals, within a broader worldwide community that includes up to 1.5 million members.

### Personal Connections and Mentoring

**Read Acts 11:22-26:** Barnabas is one of my biblical favorites. His real name is Joseph; but Barnabas means ‘son of encouragement’. He was full of the Holy Spirit and just a great guy, willing to help anyone. He even took on Paul, who had a past life stigma. Barnabas was sent to check out this Mediterranean salvation explosion. It was appropriate, since he too was originally

a Levite from Cyprus. Barnabas was one of those anonymous people who sold his property right after the Pentecost miracle to help pay for the extended stay of the worldwide pilgrims staying on in Jerusalem. One righteous act leads to more. He was using everything at his disposal to partner with the Holy Spirit. He was taking a venture of faith.

*<sup>36</sup> Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), <sup>37</sup> and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4)*

Barnabas had a heart to help God; that pulled him into the ongoing work of the Spirit. In a sense, Barnabas has some level of *spiritual ancestry* over Paul's works. He took him by the hand and got him *out there* into the mission field. I too have discovered how that an act of appreciation of God's goodness can have *ripple effects*. In 2003 I partnered with a lemon grower to pack and sell his organic lemon crop. It seemed to be an impossible task at the time. We put it before the LORD, and he made it happen. As a result, we met with my partners friends and family deep in the heart of Mexico to put on a little appreciative Christian concert and barbecue (to thank God). One thing led to the next, and we ended up morphing into a city-wide concert in Aguas Caliente's, Mexico leading to the formation of a Spanish-speaking church in the US, which still exists to this day.

Barnabas had to go to Tarsus (where Paul was from) to find him. Apparently, Paul had left Jerusalem. Paul may have had to leave as he was probably the most hated man in Jerusalem. Paul was now *off the grid*, living in anonymity. He was 186 miles from the new church in Antioch, so he was just doing his own studies at home, somewhat unplugged from the movement. It is so interesting that Paul is the headliner when Acts is re-told, and Barnabas is portrayed as a bit player. Barnabas has an ongoing more invisible footprint in the scriptures after this chapter. Paul gets much more *ongoing ink* in scripture; but Barnabas probably was working equally effectively. What Paul wrote was more in line with our learning today.

*Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup> Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. <sup>4</sup> So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. <sup>5</sup> When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper. (Acts 13)*

If we are paying attention to *the Barnabas footprint* we see the connection many church plants apart from Paul, and connections to young John-Mark (the author of the Gospel of Mark). Paul and Barnabas had irreconcilable differences, resulting in the separation and multiplication of their efforts. One of their disputes was pertaining to the usefulness of young John-Mark. Paul had no time for anyone who left in the middle of a church-building campaign. He did not want to depend on Mark in the future.

<sup>13</sup> Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem. (Acts 13)

<sup>36</sup> After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” <sup>37</sup> Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. <sup>38</sup> But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. <sup>39</sup> And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another; and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. <sup>40</sup> But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. <sup>41</sup> And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. (Acts 15)

Eventually Paul did more-clearly see the value in Mark; and he asked for his help in a future missionary venture.

<sup>11</sup> *Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.* (2 Timothy 4)

The next ripple in the pond from seeds sown by Barnabas is in the life story of John Mark. Mark is the most concise gospel; but it has a *bread crumb trail* back to Peter. Mark quotes Peter’s teachings, and he provides more details about Peter as he may have become his protégé. Mark records more about Peter’s: confession of Christ, betrayal of Christ, impulsiveness, and closeness to Jesus. Like Peter, Mark portrays Jesus as God’s suffering servant, associated with trials. Peter refers to John Mark as *his spiritual son*. We have no idea how our lives loop back into each other like a tapestry.



<sup>13</sup> *She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.* (1 Peter 5)

Paul’s past experiences would begin to make more sense as God opened up new avenues for the gospel. Previously Paul was all about the Jews. God is using him for everything except the Jews.

But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; (Acts 9:15)

The gospel needed representation to Kings and courthouses. Paul was only focused on his Jewish credentials, not his worldwide credentials. In effect, he was a well-trained courtroom attorney.

*<sup>25</sup> But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?” <sup>26</sup> When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, “What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.” <sup>27</sup> The commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” And he said, Yes.” <sup>28</sup> The commander answered, “I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money.” And Paul said, “But I was actually born a citizen.” <sup>29</sup> Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains. (Acts 22)*

Paul's argumentation and apologetics and organizational presentation of the gospel is a primary reference to us today.

*Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You are permitted to speak for yourself.” So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself: <sup>2</sup> “I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, <sup>3</sup> especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently. (Acts 26)*

*<sup>24</sup> And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. <sup>25</sup> Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.” <sup>26</sup> Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him. (Acts 24)*

#### Reciprocity and Mutual Dependence in the Body of Christ

**Read Acts 11:27-30:** Now we introduce the concept of sharing with fellow believers from your strengths and surpluses. The Jerusalem church would shortly face financial hardship, while the church members abroad experienced more prosperity. The prophet Agabus prophesies a coming famine.

## Background of Agabus

### Biblical References

- **Acts 11:27-30:** Agabus is introduced during a time of prophecy concerning a great famine that would occur throughout the Roman Empire. He is described as a prophet from Jerusalem who warned the church about the impending crisis.
- **Acts 21:10-14:** Agabus appears again when he visits Paul in Caesarea. He prophesies that Paul would be bound and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, symbolizing the trials that lay ahead for him.

### Characteristics

- **Prophetic Role:** Agabus is depicted as a true prophet, able to foretell events with precision. His prophecies are seen as warnings meant to prepare the early Church.
- **Symbolism:** In Acts 21, Agabus uses a dramatic physical act—binding his own hands and feet with Paul's belt—to illustrate the nature of Paul's future imprisonment. This method illustrates the seriousness of his message.

There were four significant famines during the 13-year reign of Claudius. He began to reign in Rome in 40 A.D. Acts 11 was written between 40-45 A.D. In 42 A.D. Rome itself had a famine; and it pulled from empire-wide stockpiles. Judah had a severe famine between 46-48 A.D., leaving the home church desperate. They had been cleaned out of inventory just before having no harvest. This drove Paul and others to raise money for the Jerusalem church as they preached out on the road. In a sense, those in Jerusalem brought the message of life; so, the recipients could at least respond to their physical needs.

*10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through <sup>14</sup>Christ who strengthens me.*  
(Philippians 4)

The gospel was the main purpose for Paul and Barnabas, but the physical need ministry added a component of urgency to collect money for the starving relatives at home in Jerusalem.