

Bold Moves Acts 11:19-26

Introduction:

1. Luke places the events that we have just read about immediately following his description of Peter's having gone to the household of Cornelius with the gospel message.
2. This move to take the gospel to Gentiles was met by Peter and the church in Jerusalem with some hesitation and caution.
3. But the O.T. was clear. Israel was supposed to influence the nations for the Lord.
 - a. In Isa. 42:6 God said He would appoint His servant (Israel/Jesus) as a light to the nations. Cf. Acts 13:47.
 - b. In Isa. 49:6 again God said that He would appoint His servant to bring salvation to the end of the earth. Cf. Acts 13:47; Lk. 2:29-32. Whether we look at Israel herself as bringing benefits to the Gentiles or doing it through Jesus it does not matter. It is clear that God's purpose was to reach the nations through Israel in one way or another.
 - c. Isa. 56:7 is quoted by Jesus in Mk. 11:17 as he removed the Jewish obstacles from the Court of the Gentiles in the temple. God said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations." He opened the way for Gentiles into the presence of God.
4. So what occurs here in Acts 11, although a bold move, is thoroughly in harmony with the purpose of God.
5. But what are we to learn from this that is relevant for our 21st century context? Let's work through the text and see what we can discover.

Discussion:

- I. Christians were scattered as a result of the persecution associated with Stephen.
 - A. These events are described in Acts 6:8ff-9:60.
 1. Stephen was preaching Jesus in Jerusalem. Some from the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including Cyrenians and Alexandrians and some from Cilicia and Asia, began arguing with Stephen.
 2. Ultimately Stephen was brought before the Jewish council and accused of speaking against Moses.
 3. They stoned Stephen to death.
 4. 8:1 says a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.
 - B. In Acts 11 Luke goes back to this scattering and says some went to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch speaking to Jews only.
 - C. The bold move came when some from Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch and began speaking to Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.
 1. These are Hellenistic Jews, Jews influenced by the Greek culture.
 2. Antioch was the 3rd largest city in the world at this time. Scholars estimate its population at about 250,000.

3. There was a large Jewish community there.
4. The city was known for lax sexual morals. The cult of Artemis and Apollo were popular as well as the ancient Syrian religion of Astarte with its ritual prostitution.
5. These Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene saw the Lord as the transforming power and hope for these people.
6. We often complain of the deterioration of our society. Often we look to Presidents and governing officials to change things and in many instances they are part of the problem.
7. The terms "Lord" and "Savior" were widely current in the religious world of the eastern Mediterranean. Many were attempting to find in their various mystery cults a divine lord who could guarantee salvation and immortality. These Christians saw Jesus as the means to this end. So they preached Him to these people looking for more than what they had.
8. Do we see Jesus as the means to transform and make the world better? Do we see ourselves as the bridge for the transformation of the lives of others? We can change the world one heart at a time preaching the Lord Jesus.

II. These Christians were not alone in their efforts. Verse 21 says, "The hand of the Lord was with them."

- A. He was not physically present with them. But He has promised to be with us (Matt. 28:19-20). Luke saw the Lord as continuing to work even after He was taken up (Acts 1:1).
- B. Verse 21 says, "a large number who believed turned to the Lord."
 1. That was certainly encouraging, or was it?
 2. How about those who did not turn to the Lord? The statement, "a large number turned to the Lord" implies that some did not.
 3. But these people were helping some and their influence would grow.
- C. The church at Jerusalem would help (22-24). The Lord would work through them.
 1. They were allied together in this same mission.
 2. I am impressed with this Jerusalem church. What they were doing was a bold move. Their history in Acts 15 indicates some issues with such a move.
- D. Barnabas would help. The Lord would work through him (23-24). Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus, like some of those who had first preached to the Gentiles in Antioch (cf. v. 20).
 1. Noticed that he witnessed the grace of God. God was at work!!
 2. He rejoiced and encouraged them to remain true to the Lord.
 3. He was a good man, full of the Spirit and faith. Note the emphasis on his character. Luke does not describe him as friendly, charismatic, outgoing, wealthy

- E. The result was considerable numbers were brought to the Lord (v. 24).
- F. The Lord continued to work. Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch (25-26).
 1. Sometimes our role is to connect people to facilitate the work.
 2. Saul was God's special servant to the Gentiles. Barnabas facilitated the relationship between this Gentile church and Saul, this special servant to Gentiles.

3. The result (v. 26).

III. This Gentile church now made a bold move (27-30).

- A. They would send a contribution to Jerusalem to respond to a famine.
- B. The unity of the congregation in Antioch is evident in verse 29.
- C. This new church acted and they acted responsibly (v. 30).

Conclusion:

- 1. This Gentile congregation at Antioch became a powerful force in the spread of the gospel.
- 2. The 1st, 2nd, 3rd, missionary journeys of Paul all originated from here. Barnabas and Mark's journey also began here (Acts 15:39).
- 3. They confronted difficulty with the Jews (Acts 15; cf. 14:19) but stood firm and continued their work of engaging the world for the Lord.
- 4. Oh that we might be bold like them both individually and congregationally.