

A PROPHET SHOWS UP Acts 11:27-30

This morning we bring our study of Acts chapter 11 to an end. The bulk of this chapter dealt with Peter's recounting of what happened with the Gentile centurion Cornelius (as recorded in Acts 10). The Holy Spirit of God came upon that Gentile man and those with him and that **forever changed the nature of the work of God on the earth**. So two chapters were given to this monumental occurrence and change (and more will follow when we get to chapter 15). But the closing verses of chapter 11 deal with a totally unrelated issue. Let's read it...

Acts 11:27-30

Agabus is a name that up to this point in our study of the book of Acts is **unknown**. He will actually show up a second time, later in the book. Let's read that as well...

Acts 21:7-14

There are a number of items that are significant about Agabus and his prophecies...

1. The fact that we hear of Agabus **only twice** in all of the scriptures, yet each time, in his giving a prophecy, I think it is very significant that **both times his prophecy was DEAD ON correct**.

If it was said of Agabus that he prophesied MANY TIMES about MANY THINGS and two of these predictions were correct we might say, "Well, that was pretty good." Because, truth is, that is about where most of our **modern day** so-called "prophets" are.

I say that because I've been reading and listening to the so-called modern day prophets for years. If I were to have based my life upon them and their prophecies

- I never would have gotten married,
- never bought a house,
- never thought it wise to make a single investment,
- and likely would have moved away from the U.S. decades ago.

These modern day prophets, it seems, **hardly ever have a positive thing to say** (which, I will acknowledge, pretty well fits with the Biblical prophets as well). They are nearly always gloom and doom. But **rarely are they on target**. So

- We didn't have a war with Russia back in the 70s.
- The stock market and the dollar did not collapse in the 1980s
- The antiChrist did not arise out of Syria in the 1980s
- Trees have continued to abound on the earth and can be found in far more places than museums
- The air still is breathable
- We still have oil
- The rapture didn't occur in 1988, nor did it occur the several times that radio fraud Harold Camping said it was certain to take place

These false prophets have **filled the pulpits and the airways for decades**. One would think that even after a single "false prophecy" those around these frauds would abandon them, but as P.T. Barnum supposedly said, "There is a sucker born every minute." And so, true prophecy...false prophecy...it doesn't really seem to matter too much to many within our churches.

Deuteronomy 18:20

That is what is SUPPOSED to happen to a false prophet. But not in our day! No, these crooks write a book full of their predictions, half of them won't happen and people **will still buy their books!**

So, good for Agabus! Two for two...batting a 1,000. He was a true prophet. I wish I could name even one such prophet in our day and age. But I can't...and neither can you!

2. The second thing that is interesting about Agabus is that he had such a hearing.

1 Corinthians 14:26-33

Here the apostle Paul gives direction to the church at Corinth. It is direction that **ENCOURAGES** tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecies, etc. But it encourages these things in an orderly way.

I have often thought, "How would I handle it if someone, some Sunday morning, suddenly stood up and starting speaking in tongues?" I have thought that if that happened I would let them continue (assuming they didn't go a real long time) and then, when it became clear they had finished, I would ask, "Does anyone here have an interpretation?" And then, very honestly, I would hope...really hope...that **two people** would raise their hand. For if two raised their hands I would say, "Excellent. Please give those two people each a piece of paper and a pen or pencil" and then I would ask them to write down what the interpretation was of what had been said. When they were finished I would collect the two pieces of paper and read them both. In that way,

If the two pieces of paper agreed, then there would be **NO QUESTION** that this was **entirely from God**: both the speaking in tongues and the interpretation. That, I might add, is an experience – an event – that I would **LOVE** to see happen at Burning Hearts. A God event, no question about it.

If the two pieces of paper **did not agree**, that would **not** mean that this was not of God, for it could be argued that one of the interpreters was truly communicating God's truth and the other was not. Things would not be as clear under this scenario as if we had two interpretations that were in agreement.

But regardless, as with the words of prophecy, **we are all to judge**. That is, we are **never** to just take it that what was said was true just because someone said it. We are to judge. And it is here that I think the issue of the **CHARACTER** of the person doing the speaking – particularly a word of prophecy – how well we know that person matters a lot.

It's like preaching and the critique or criticism that a preacher may get. The person giving the critique matters a LOT. If I come home some Sunday and Ruth says – and I'm just making this up – "That was a LOSER of a sermon," well, that would matter a lot, because I respect her opinion and she is really well grounded in the scriptures. Conversely, if she were to say, "That was an EXCELLENT sermon," well, that means a lot as well.

How well I remember one Sunday, some 25 years or go, when at the end of a sermon a man came up and began complementing me on the sermon. Admittedly, I was probably getting a bit of a big head about it all...until he said, "Yes, what you said reminded me of an article I read in Playboy magazine recently..." **I don't recall a single word that he said after that.** But I knew, deep down, if **he** thought my sermon was good, it probably was a loser through and through.

So the prophets speak and the others judge.

Now Agabus' prediction was of a severe famine over the entire Roman world. And then Luke adds in "This took place in the days of Claudius," meaning this took place while Claudius was Caesar.

I did a bit of research about this and found that indeed, even to those who have NO INTEREST in Biblical things, the reign of Claudius (from 41-54) came to be characterized as a time of famine.

- Seneca writes of two different famines during Claudius' reign. The one occurring in what would be called 42 A.D. and the other in 51 A.D.
- Schoene writes of a famine in Greece in 49 A.D.
- 4th century historian Oresius mentions a famine in Syria from 46-47 A.D.
- And Josephus, in his Jewish Antiquities writes of a famine that struck Palestine during this same period. Queen Helena of Adiabene, a relative of Claudius, was during this period becoming intrigued with Judaism and had traveled to Jerusalem at this time. Seeing the great famine that was occurring there she purchased grain from Alexandria to help feed those who were starving. Many starved to death during this time.

So Agabus nailed it on the head.

But believing Agabus, even before the famine had struck, Luke tells us here that the disciples, meaning the disciples in Antioch (being both Jewish and Gentile) committed, as each was able, to helping the mother church in Jerusalem.

And so Barnabas and Saul were designated to bring their gifts to the elders at the church in Judea, likely meaning Jerusalem.

Now what is the application of this text?

1. Unless we are going to view the book of Acts as strictly and only the "history of salvation" (and **not** also showing us the "order of salvation") then we should remain open to those who may exercise a gift of prophecy today. Granted, as noted a few Sundays ago, many church leaders, Bible schools and seminaries have written off prophecy, tongues, healings and the like all as being but foundational spiritual gifts given to the church to help in its formation. These individuals and institutions lack a good Biblical basis for their cessationism, but I would be among the first to say that cessationism also saves them a lot of GRIEF...the grief of having to put up with all the charlatans that have milked and continue to milk naïve believers in our God of miracles.

My personal attitude, as a shepherd in the body of Christ, is that for all the prophets out there claiming they have something good to offer the body of Christ, I for one am not interested in what they have to offer. There's just too much gravel mixed in with the grain. It is not worth the time and effort. If you personally want to run the risk of cracking a tooth while trying to eat what they have to offer you, then fine. But I'm not going to encourage you to eat what they are offering, I'm not going to advertise when they say they are in town and I for one think I still have plenty to digest just feeding on the written word of God.

Find me an Agabus, and I will listen. But I'm not interested in any more false prophets.

2. When we know we should act, then let's act.
Those who heard Agabus didn't just smile and then do nothing.

James 2:14-17

1 John 3:16-18

When the Christians at Antioch heard what was going to happen, they decided among themselves to do what they were able to make things better for their Christian brothers and sisters back in Judea...back at the place of the mother church. They didn't just form a committee – the only certain way to KILL an idea. No, they simply acted. That is a good model for us.

Matthew 25:31-46

No prophet is needed to move us to action when we learn of needs – needs that we can help fill. What is needed is simply a responsive heart. I believe you all have that kind of heart, and because I believe that it is why I have said for years, "If you are part of Burning Hearts, you will **never starve**, or **end up homeless**." For as long as God continues to bless us the way he has I KNOW we will literally bless those that we learn of who are in need.

3. These Christians in Antioch felt indebted to their spiritual ancestors, and we should as well.

The spiritual ancestors, in this case, were those back in Judea. Now of particular interest here is that this church in Antioch was a **MIXED CONGREGATION**: made up of both Jews and Gentiles. One might expect that the Jewish believers in Jesus would have felt some concern for their "brothers" back home...back in Judea. But what of the Gentile believers? They were not blood relatives of the apostles or those in the Jerusalem church. The apostle Paul in the book of Romans pleaded with God for what he called "my brothers, the people of my own race" (Romans 9:3), but the Gentiles didn't have that kind of connection with the believers back in Israel.

Yet apparently even to them there was a felt need to give to help.

And that is as things should be.

Sometime ago I was talking to a good Christian man about why he left the church that he had been attending. He explained his reason for leaving. He said, "There is an element within that church that is an elderly element. But the church leadership shows **absolutely no concern** for them: for their ability to hear, or for their comfort. It is really quite terrible how they treat their senior citizens. It is as if the church leaders are totally

focused on bringing in young families and that is all they care about."

This concerned this man greatly, and rightly so.

Acts 11 is a reminder that we should never forget that **we all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before**. Inherent in church life there should be, therefore,

- a respect of those who are older in the faith
- a true respect for our church elders, and all the more so if they are elderly in age
- a very special regard for any man or woman who spent time in helping to see us personally grow up in Christ
- a hesitancy to lay hands on those who are young in the faith, even as the apostle Paul warned against in 1 Timothy 3:6, and
- a special recognition of those who are Jewish believers in the Messiah. For theirs has been the much harder field to plow. For some of them it has cost them their family. We particularly honor them.

4. May God lead the modern church in knowing how to appropriately respond to big issues. For the church in Acts 11, the "big issue" was a coming famine over the entire Roman world. For us today, it seems to me that the issues are things like

- this current coronavirus pandemic over the entire world.
- the ongoing racial strife that is particularly evident in the U.S.
- the financial inequity that is growing greater and greater between those who have and those who do not. I read this past week that Jeff Bezos' financial wealth is now SO ENORMOUS that if one were to stack his money in a pile of 1 dollar bills, that stack could reach the space station **30 times over!** Don't get me wrong: I have nothing against Jeff Bezos. But his wealth is illustrative of the difference between the very small number of people on this earth who own the VAST MAJORITY of all wealth. It is hard to conclude this is how it is supposed to be.
- the lack of religious freedom in so many parts of the world. The fact that people are being persecuted for their faith – Christians now recognized as the most persecuted of all peoples on the earth – should bother everyone, Christian or not

- (Lastly) the fact that the desire for toleration in the world of academia and the arts has turned into a witch hunt for any who teach, think or create in a way that is contrary to the accepted norm. This is a stifling of truth, a dooming of free thought, the end of human expression, and a hindrance to the spreading of the good news regarding the Lordship of Jesus over all of life.

Agabus had a warning regarding the whole Roman world.

We need to see and heed these warnings regarding where our world is heading...and then...like the believers in Antioch, DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!