

The Lord Who Provides.
Acts 11:27-30.
Sunday morning, July 11, 2010.

I. The Church with few spiritual recourses.

- A. In those days prophets came from the church in Jerusalem to help out in the church in Antioch. Imagine the state of the Church at this time. Acts 11:27.
1. The persecution in Jerusalem had led to the scattering of the church far and wide. Hundreds of congregations may well have come into existence by now, which were scattered over hundreds of miles.
 2. There were only 12 apostles for all these churches.
 3. Copies of the OT Scriptures were scarce in those days. They were kept in the synagogues; they had to be multiplied by hand, and that was done by especially trained men called scribes; it was done meticulously and painstakingly. Most churches simply had no access to the Scriptures (OT Scriptures), or access to only fragments of them.
 4. There were no theological colleges or seminaries in those days.
 5. The NT had not yet been written.
 6. There were no commentaries or other helps, written from a Christ-centered perspective, available to the fledgling Church of Christ.
- B. So how did the Church survive during these years?
1. The answer to this question reveals an important truth which governs the Kingdom of God:
The things, necessary for life and godliness, which we are unable to provide for ourselves by the ordinary use of means, God Himself will provide for us by His special providence.
“Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing.” Psalm 34:9,10.
 2. In keeping with this important truth the Lord raised up in those days special gifts and offices in His church. Next to, and right besides the apostles, there were NT prophets. These were inspired teachers, especially equipped by the Holy Spirit, who were able to teach the churches the word of the Lord without the use of the now ordinary means for the ministry of the Word of God.
 3. The NT places these men right besides the apostles, and sees them as part of the foundation of the Church. See 1 Cor. 12:28 and Ephesians 2:20.
 4. A similar truth existed in the Church regarding obedience to the command to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. That command was good and well as far as the reaches of the Roman Empire were concerned, for all learned Greek within the borders of the Empire. But who would take the gospel to the “Barbarian and Scythian” of Northern Europe, Russia and Siberia. Those, often nomadic people, did not even have a written language, and they were totally uncivilized. Still Colossians 3:11 lists them as having a place in the Church. To reach them God equipped His Church in those days with the gift of tongues or languages as it occurred on the day of Pentecost. 1 Cor. 12:28.
 5. Later in the history of the Church, when the helps of a completed NT,

theological schools, language schools and other helps became available these special helps died out.

6. This dying out of these gifts however, was not of such a nature that they never have occurred again, or never will occur again, for God remains a God who is free to work without, above, or against the means of which He ordinarily makes use in the work of His providence. WCF Ch 5.2.

Application:

The Principle illustrated and outlined above goes a long way to give shape and direction to our lives as Christians:

1. We should always fear the Lord; that is we should have Him as the reference point of the whole of our lives. We should always seek and serve Him.
2. We should always be diligent in the use of means, which is God's ordinary way of directing us, and providing for us.
3. We should be confident that when the use of ordinary means is insufficient for the maintaining of life and godliness, the Lord in His special providence will make up the difference.

II. The Church with few material recourses.

- A. One of these prophets, by the Holy Spirit, showed that a great famine would come on the whole Roman Empire.
 1. Perhaps this prophecy came several years before its fulfillment so that the Church had time to store food for these difficult days as in the days of Joseph.
 2. The fulfillment of the prophecy came in the year 45 AD. when a severe flooding of the Nile River destroyed Egypt's grain harvest. Egypt was the bread basket of the Roman Empire in those days. Grain prices skyrocketed and remained very high for the next three years, causing great hardships for a great many people. See 2 Cor 8:1-4 in this light.
 3. On top of this empire wide hardship the region of Jerusalem and Judea experienced a severe drought lasting from 45-48 AD. This made the lives of the people of that region especially difficult. Hence the relief efforts of all the churches, and that at a particularly difficult time, in behalf of the church in Jerusalem and Judea.
- B. Why these providential circumstances at this time? The answer to these kinds of questions is always the same; to form Christ's image in us. Galatians 4:19.
The distinguishing marks of this image remain ever the same:
 - A. Christ parted with the great and glorious riches of position and privilege which He lawfully possessed and did not have to give up. Philippians 2:6.
 - B. Christ sanctified Himself (set Himself apart) to God's people, and bore their burdens. John 17:19.
 - C. He did so freely; without there being a law demanding it from Him. Moses was the great type of the image of Christ in the OT.

Application:

How are you coming Along with the image of Christ being formed in you? Do you pray for it? Desire it? Are you holding the treasures of this world more loosely; setting yourself apart to the needs of God's people, and are you doing so freely?