

BARNABAS — SON OF ENCOURAGEMENT

ACTS 4:36-37

INTRODUCTION

- A. In the Bible, names often describe the character of the person named. Consider:
1. Peter - **Matthew 16:18** "And I also say to you that you are Peter [*petros* or stone], and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. (NASB)
 2. James and John - **Mark 3:17** and James, the [son] of Zebedee, and John the brother of James to them He gave the name Boanerges {bo-an-erg-es'}, which means, "Sons of Thunder"; (NASB)
- B. One of the most interesting men in the New Testament had a descriptive name: Barnabas.
1. He was a member of the church in Jerusalem in its earliest days.
 2. He was a Levite from Cyprus.
 3. His given name was Joseph, but he had been surnamed by the apostles as "Barnabas" (Acts 4:36)
 - a. Barnabas was a Hebrew name.
 - b. Its Greek equivalent meant "son of consolation" (KJV). Cf. "encouragement" (NASB), "exhortation" (NEB), "comfort" (Phillips).
- D. What can we learn of the man whose name meant "son of encouragement"?

I. THE EARLY DAYS IN JERUSALEM

- A. His unselfish generosity - Acts 4:36-37. Cf. 1 Cor. 9:6.
1. Evidently an early convert to Christianity, Barnabas was well known to the apostles.
 2. He was a landowner who sold land and laid the money at the apostles' feet.
Cf. Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35.
- B. His defense of Paul, the new convert to Christ - Acts 9:26-27.
1. He was willing to investigate the facts.
 - a. How did Barnabas know Paul's situation?
 - b. Perhaps he was in touch with Christians in Damascus, but he may have simply taken the time to ask Paul what had happened. He checked the facts before making up his mind about Paul.
 2. He was willing to defend the "suspect." He ran the risk of losing the favor of the church leaders in Jerusalem, but he did what was right regardless.

II. PREACHING WITH PAUL

- A. Activity at Antioch - Ac. 11:19-30.
1. He was sent by the church at Jerusalem to investigate the events at Antioch. He was capable of being trusted with an important mission - v.22.
 2. A "good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (v.24).
 3. When he saw "the grace of God" he was "glad" (v.23).
 - a. He did not begrudge what was happening, as other Jews might.
 - b. He did not allow prejudice to keep him from seeing evidence of God's grace.
 4. He "encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord" (v.23). He had a sincere, active concern for the spiritual welfare of others.
 5. Partly because of his help, "a great many people were added to the Lord" (v.24). He was an effective evangelist.
 6. It was Barnabas who brought Paul from Tarsus to work at Antioch - vv.25-26.

- a. He no doubt knew of Paul's special mission to the Gentiles - Acts 9:15.
 - b. He knew that Antioch was where Paul needed to be.
- 7. He was sent to Jerusalem, along with Paul, to carry aid for the needy brethren in Judea - vv. 27-30. He was trustworthy, dependable.
- 8. He returned to Antioch only after they had "fulfilled their ministry" (Acts 12:25). This suggests that he did not just deliver the aid, but stayed awhile to help personally.
- 9. He brought John Mark, his cousin, back to Antioch. **Colossians 4:10** Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and [also] Barnabas' cousin Mark about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him; (NASB)
- B. First missionary journey - Acts 13:1-14:28.
 - 1. He headed the list of "prophets and teachers" in Antioch - 13:1.
 - 2. He was among those who "ministered to the Lord, and fasted" (13:2). Barnabas was a man of sincere service and devotion.
 - 3. By the Holy Spirit, he was "separated" along with Paul, for preaching work in other areas - 13:2-3.
 - a. Notice the order of the names: Barnabas and Paul, not Paul and Barnabas - 11:30; 12:25; 13:2,7.
 - b. At 13:13, the reference is to "Paul and his party." After the events at Paphos (except in 14:14 and 15:12,25) Paul's name always comes first - 13:43,46,50; 15:2,22,35.
 - 4. At Antioch in Pisidia, he and Paul "grew bold" (13:46).
 - 5. Also at Antioch in Pisidia, he suffered persecution - 13:50.
 - 6. At Lystra, he was called "Zeus (Jupiter)" by the populace, while Paul was called "Hermes (Mercury)" -14: 6-15.
 - a. Hermes was the messenger of the Greek gods, while Zeus was the chief god.
 - b. Was Paul identified with Hermes because of his oratory, while Barnabas thought to be Zeus because of his quiet, reserved dignity and strength?
 - 7. He was referred to as an "apostle" (14:14). This is the general use of the term "apostle," simply meaning "one sent" (here by the church in Antioch), rather than the specialized use applied only to the Twelve and Paul.
 - 8. He "completed" his mission and gave a full report to the church in Antioch - Ac.14:26-28.

CONCLUSION

- A. Barnabas was a "good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Acts 11:24).
- B. His help to Paul was of great significance.
- C. But there were surely many other brethren in the New Testament period who benefited from the "encouragement" of this Barnabas, whose name meant "Son of Encouragement."
- D. Having obeyed the gospel of Christ preached by this good man, do we strive to emulate Christ as he did?