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**Joseph of Cyprus: A Mighty Man of Faith! - Part 1**  
**(Joseph Who?!)**

By Tal Davis

The Bible tells the stories of great men and women of faith. In the Old Testament are Abraham, Moses, Joseph, David, Esther, Deborah, and many others, The New Testament chronicles the lives of Jesus (of course), Peter, Paul, John, and other great disciples of the Lord. One of the greatest of the Biblical characters was a man named Joseph of Cyprus. You may be asking: "Joseph of Cyprus, who was he?" In this two part article we will examine the life of this outstanding man.

You may think Joseph of Cyprus must have been some obscure disciple mentioned somewhere in the Bible, sort of like Stephanas, Fortunatus, or Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17). Actually, he was one of the most important figures in the New Testament church, even as much as the Apostle Paul. Still don't recognize his name? Let's explore some of the passages in Luke's second book, the Acts of the Apostles, where Joseph of Cyprus is mentioned quite often, and where is chronicled the good work and fine Christian character he modeled in his life.

Early in the book of Acts we are introduced to Joseph of Cyprus.

*Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement). (Acts 4:36a NASB)*

This verse shows that Joseph of Cyprus was a positive person as illustrated by the name he was given by his friends. They called him "Barnabas." That name probably comes from two Aramaic

words meaning "Son of Encouragement" or "Son of Consolation." "Oh, that's who Joseph of Cyprus was!" So now you know who he was and how he got his better known name, Barnabas.

Do you have a nickname? You know, like Joe, Bob, Sally, or something else? Sometimes people have nicknames that reflect one of their personal characteristics. Men used to be called names like Red, Moose, or Shorty. Not so much anymore, as people today tend to be more sensitive. I knew a woman whose nickname was "Baby" (yes, she was the youngest in her family). She was called that until she died in her nineties. Of course, we all know these guys: "Bashful," "Doc," "Dopey," "Grumpy," "Happy," "Sleepy" and "Sneezy."

Barnabas' appellation indicated that he was a man who cared about other people. As we will see, his whole life was dedicated to serving others and spreading the Gospel in Jesus name. He was also a man who gave unselfishly.

*(Barnabas) owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:36b NASB)*

What a model for generosity. Giving and stewardship are vital to Christian growth and discipleship. That being said, as good stewards of the resources entrusted to us by God, we must give with the right motives. Giving should never be to curry favor or gain power. We should give out of grateful heart, and not under duress.

*Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God*

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*loves a cheerful giver. (2 Cor.9:7 NASB)*

As stewards, we must also exercise discernment to whom we give. Unfortunately, not all ministries are worthy of our financial support. There are a lot of charlatans who disguise themselves as ministers but are only in it for the money.

But Barnabas was not just a man with a positive attitude and a generous giver. He was also one who spoke positively on behalf of others. When Saul (Paul) had his vision of the resurrected Jesus on the Damascus Road, the church leaders in Jerusalem were hesitant to trust him and accept him into the fellowship. After all, Saul had been one of their worst enemies. Nonetheless, Barnabas stood with him and testified to the validity of Saul's conversion.

*When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus. (Acts 9:26-27 NASB)*

As Christians we should speak well of our fellow believers. One the biggest problems of churches is undue criticism of the leadership, pastors, elders, or deacons. Another harmful practice is gossip. We should remember that the world will often judge Christ by how we love one another. If all that unsaved people hear when they go to church is negativism, they will be repelled from listening to the message.

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will*

*know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35 NASB)*

Not only did Barnabas stand up on behalf of others, he also encouraged new believers. When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard that a spiritual awakening had broken out in Antioch, they selected Barnabas to go and investigate.

*The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord. (Acts 11:21-23 NASB)*

The church leaders in Jerusalem naturally knew that Barnabas was the right man for the job of discipling the new believers in Antioch. They saw in him the caring and patient attitude necessary to provide sound guidance to the excited new church. In that light, Luke gives his own personal evaluation of the kind of person Barnabas was:

*For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. (Acts 11:24)*

That's a pretty good commendation for anyone to get.

Now notice a strategic personnel move Barnabas made to assist him in his work.

*And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. (Acts 11:25-26) NASB)*

Barnabas went about 100 miles, all the way to Tarsus, to get Saul (Paul). He wanted the still young believer to go back with him to Antioch. This was likely for two reasons. One was so

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Barnabas could personally disciple Saul and help him grow in his Christian faith. It was also because Barnabas saw in Paul great potential and wanted to train him to do ministry and preach the Gospel. The two men stayed in Antioch for one year where the believers were first called "Christians." Because of their efforts, Antioch became one of the greatest churches in the New Testament era!

Every new Christian needs to be disciplined and trained. This takes time and discipline to do it well. Too many people have gone off the tracks spiritually because they did not take the time to be mentored by a mature believer. If you are a mature believer and know a young Christian, ask them if you can help them in their spiritual growth.

So now we know who Joseph of Cyprus was: Barnabas, the "Son of Encouragement." The moniker, as we have seen so far, was totally appropriate. But there was much more to that great man of faith. As we said, he was one of the most significant individuals in the early First Century church. Eventually he was counted among the apostles themselves by Luke.

*But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out. (Acts 14:14 NASB)*

In the second installment we will continue to examine the life and legacy of Joseph of Cyprus.

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