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Joseph of Cyprus: A Mighty Man of Faith! - Part 2
(Joseph Who?!)

By Tal Davis

In the first installment of this two part series, we were introduced to a man named Joseph of Cyprus. According to Scripture, he was one of the greatest followers of Jesus who ever lived. Most people probably had no idea who that referred to in the Bible until we looked at the one particular verse in Acts where he is first mentioned.

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)

Yes, Joseph of Cyprus was none other than Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement. In part one, we looked at several passages which testified to his sterling character, strong faith, and willingness to do whatever God expected of him. He is a great role-model for Christians in all eras. Barnabas was a positive-minded person as reflected in the nickname given to him by the Apostles. He was also generous, selling a whole tract of land and giving the proceeds to the Apostles (Acts 4:36).

One of his most admirable traits was his willingness to speak on behalf of people in need. For example, the church in Jerusalem was hesitant to trust the newly converted Saul, until Barnabas vouched for his faith (Acts 9:26-27). He was also the one man the Jerusalem church knew would make a full investigation of the growing church in Antioch and disciple the new believers there in sound doctrine. (Acts 11:21-23).

So Barnabas was a genuinely good man. People looked to him for spiritual leadership. But he was

also a man people could trust. When the Antioch Christians learned that the believers in Jerusalem were facing hard times financially because of a famine in Judea, they knew they needed to take action. Consequently they took up a sizable relief offering to send to them. So who did they choose to take it? Who else? *29 And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. 30 And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders. (Acts 11:29-30 NASB)*

In those days, the police had no internet and very poor communication between regions. So Barnabas and Saul could have easily absconded with the money and never been heard from again. But the Antioch believers knew that they were not those kind of men. Christians, above all others, must have high levels of integrity. If we are entrusted with money, confidentiality, and even in a marriage, trust must be established and maintained. Remember, if we lose a person's or people's trust, even once, it is almost always lost forever.

Barnabas was also unafraid to take bold steps for the furtherance of the Gospel. When Barnabas and Paul were ministering in Antioch, the Holy Spirit Himself told the church to send the two men go on a mission. *While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. (Acts 13:2-3 NASB)*

The two men then set out for Seleucia on the nearby coast. From there they set sail for Salamis, on the

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island of Cyprus, where they began to preach the Gospel. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, they sailed to several cities in Phrygia, in Asia Minor, where they were successful making converts among the Jews and the Gentiles. At one point, in Lystra, the people there thought they were actually Greek gods come to earth. The two missionaries quickly turned the incident into an opportunity to share the Gospel. *The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. (Acts 14:13-15 NASB)*

Eventually Barnabas and Paul made their way back to Antioch to report. Soon a controversy arose in Jerusalem when it was learned that Gentiles were being saved apart from first becoming Jewish. Therefore, the Antioch church sent Barnabas and Paul to testify to a church council what God was doing there, and on their mission among the Gentiles. So the church leaders in Jerusalem questioned them. *All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. (Acts 15:12 NASB)*

After their testimony, and that of Peter, the church council ruled that Gentiles were not required to convert to Judaism in order to be Christians. James, the brother of Jesus, rendered the verdict: Therefore it is

my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood." (Acts 15:19-20 NASB)

The point is, Barnabas (and his co-minister Paul) had no compunction about doing whatever God commanded him to do, go wherever He sent him, or to preach the Gospel to whom-ever he could.

Finally we see in Scripture that Barnabas looked at people, not for what they were, but what they could become. This quality was made evident when Paul wanted Barnabas to go with him on another evangelistic trip. Barnabas was excited to do so, but he wanted them to take along his cousin, John Mark. Paul, however, refused to allow him to come because, in their earlier mission tour, John Mark had inexplicably abandoned them and, apparently, gone home to Jerusalem. This disagreement led to Paul and Barnabas splitting up and going in different directions.

After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. (Acts 15:36-41 NASB)

Paul probably felt he was justified not to trust that John Mark would not do again what he did before and go

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AWOL. But Barnabas could see that John Mark still had a lot of potential in evangelism and ministry. Barnabas had a gift for seeing the good possibilities in those he knew. Perhaps John Mark had apologized to him and Paul. In any case, it appears that Barnabas was correct in his estimation since John Mark is the man who is credited with writing the Gospel of Mark. Paul must have eventually changed his mind about him as well. He later mentions him in three of his letters. He even accompanied Paul to Rome (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24).

Conclusion

Yes, Joseph of Cyprus became Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement. He was obviously one of the greatest, but humblest, men in the Bible. His Christian character is an example for us all as are the qualities he demonstrated.

- * He had a positive attitude.
- * He was an unselfish steward of his material possessions.
- * He spoke positively about people.
- * He encouraged new believers.
- * He had high unquestioned integrity.
- * He was bold and unafraid to speak the gospel.
- * He saw people's potential.

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