

Who was Barnabas in the Bible?

In the book of Acts, we find a Levite from Cyprus named Joses (Acts 4:36), whom the apostles called Barnabas. That nickname, translated “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36-37) or “Son of Exhortation” was probably given to him because of his inclination to serve others (Acts 4:36-37, 9:27) and his willingness to do whatever church leaders needed (Acts 11:25-30). He is referred to as a “good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.” Through his ministry, “a great number of people were brought to the Lord” (Acts 11:24). Paul uses Barnabas as an example of one with a proper perspective on money and property. When he sold his land, he brought the proceeds to the apostles and laid it at their feet (Acts 4:36-37).

As the early church began to grow, in spite of Herod’s persecution, Barnabas was called by the Holy Spirit to go with Paul on a missionary journey. Barnabas’ cousin, John Mark, served him and Paul as their assistant (Acts 13:5). During that first missions trip, for an unspecified reason, John Mark left them and did not complete the journey (Acts 13:13). However, Barnabas continued with Paul and was with him when Paul’s ministry was redirected to reaching the Gentiles with the gospel (Acts 13:42-52). The only negative mention of Barnabas in Scripture is in reference to an incident in which Peter’s hypocrisy influenced other Jews (including Barnabas) to shun some Gentiles at dinner (Galatians 2:13).

After that first trip, Paul and Barnabas began planning their next journey. Barnabas wanted to take his cousin, but Paul refused, and a rift grew between them to the point that they parted company (Acts 15:36-41). Barnabas, true to his nickname, took John Mark and spent time discipling him. That ministry was so effective that, years later, Paul specifically asked for John Mark to come to him, as Mark had matured to the point of

becoming helpful to Paul in his ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).

Like Barnabas, as Christians we are called to be encouragers, particularly of those who are weak in the faith or struggling. Acts 11:23 depicts Barnabas as a man who was delighted to see others exhibiting the grace of God in their lives, exhorting and encouraging them to remain faithful. In the same way, we should look for opportunities to praise those who bring glory and honor to God through lives that reflect their faith. In addition, Barnabas is an example of a generous spirit when it comes to giving sacrificially to the work of the Lord.