



# Barnabas:

## A NICKNAME MADE GOOD

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# What's in a nickname?

## ▶ Nicknames are used in one of three main ways:

- To define someone by appearance e.g. Rusty, Four eyes, Titch, Lanky
- As a term of affection or endearment e.g. Honey, Sweetheart
- To describe an attribute or trait. e.g. Brains, Speedy, Lefty

## ▶ A nickname can become as well known as the true name

- The Boss Bruce Springsteen
- Satchmo Louis Armstrong
- The Desert Fox Field Marshal Rommel
- The Bard of Avon William Shakespeare
- Great White Shark Greg Norman

# Nicknames in Scripture

- ▶ **Boanerges – Sons of thunder** *The apostles James and John*
- ▶ **Cephas – The rock** *The apostle Peter*
- ▶ **Immanuel – God with us** *Jesus*
- ▶ **Barnabas ???**

# Joseph who?

## ▶ We first meet him in the early church after Pentecost

*“<sup>36</sup> Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”) ...”*

**Acts 4:36**

## ▶ Born ‘Joseph’ but nicknamed ‘Barnabas’ by the apostles

- A reminder of the OT character of that name in Genesis (ch 37, 39–50) who also ended up serving God in a foreign land and saving others
- A glowing affirmation of his character

## ▶ Either ‘son of encouragement’ or ‘son of exhortation’

- Highlighting a noticed aptitude for offering consolation to fellow believers during difficult times and probably he had a gift for teaching the gospel truths

# Barnabas roots

## ▶ Barnabas was a Levite

- Remember the three classes of Jewish 'clergy': high priests, priests, Levites
- Levites were subordinate officials overseeing minor temple duties
- As a Levite he would have been well studied in the Mosaic Laws

## ▶ Living on Cyprus

- probably from a family of 'Jews of the dispersion'
  - families forced out of Israel after one of the various foreign conquests
- Brought up on Cyprus he probably spoke Greek
- He would be familiar with Gentile life and Hellenistic Judaism
  - religious practices of Jews who spoke Greek and observed Greek culture

# Generosity

## ▶ **Barnabas was open-handed in his attitude to material wealth**

*“<sup>37</sup> ... sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”*

**Acts 4:37**

- Levites traditionally lived off the temple system, but Barnabas owned land
- This may suggest he had above average in wealth
- However, on following Jesus he freely donated the proceeds from the sale of his property to meet the needs of others

# Trust and encouragement and integrity

## ▶ Barnabas was a lone voice for Saul in Jerusalem after his conversion

*“<sup>26</sup> When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ”*

**Acts 9:26-27**

- We can infer Barnabas was highly respected by the Christians in Jerusalem
- The church trusted Barnabas judgement on Saul
- As a result, Saul a violent opponent of the church enjoyed fellowship Jesus' disciples and proclaimed the gospel boldly

# Spiritual depth and a mission

## ▶ **Barnabas was recognised as having exceptional spiritual qualities**

*“<sup>22</sup> News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. <sup>24</sup> He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.” Acts 11:22-24*

- The apostles trusted his judgement and sent him to assess the new church
- With his life in tune with the Holy Spirit he recognised God at work
- His affirming nature encouraged the flourishing church in Syrian Antioch
- Result - the church grew!

**Note:** Syrian Antioch was the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in the Roman Empire

# Coach and mentor

## ▶ Barnabas encouraged Saul to become a missionary leader

*“<sup>25</sup> Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, <sup>26</sup> and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”*

**Acts 9:26-27**

- During the spiritual awakening at Antioch Barnabas realized he needed help
- He brought in Saul from his hometown of Tarsus (about 150 miles away)

**Note:** Antioch is where the followers of ‘The Way’ are first called Christians

# Faith in action

## ▶ **Barnabas and Saul organized collections to help believers in Judea**

*“<sup>27</sup> During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) <sup>29</sup> The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. <sup>30</sup> This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.” Acts 11: 27-30*

- Faith and love in action
- One faith community was mainly Jewish - the other mainly Gentile
- Barnabas and Saul took the monies collected to Jerusalem
- *“<sup>25</sup> When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.” Acts 12:25*
- Brought back Mark, who was Barnabas’ cousin (**Colossians 4:10**)...more later

# Prophet and teacher

## ▶ Barnabas was highly gifted

*“<sup>1</sup> Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.*

**Acts 13:1**

- Prophets are the spokespersons and representatives of God to His people
- Prophecies could contain proclamation (forthtelling) or prediction (foretelling)
- Teachers instructed others in the Gospel and in godly living
- Both roles require gifting and commitment

# Chosen by the Holy Spirit

## ▶ **The Holy Spirit appointed Barnabas and Saul to evangelize Gentiles**

*“<sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” <sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”*

**Acts 13:2-3**

- The laying on hands before their journey allowed the fellowship to join with the missionaries in their work and recognized God’s call upon them
- They were literally ‘made holy’ (set aside) for the task of mission

# Stepping out in faith and being humble

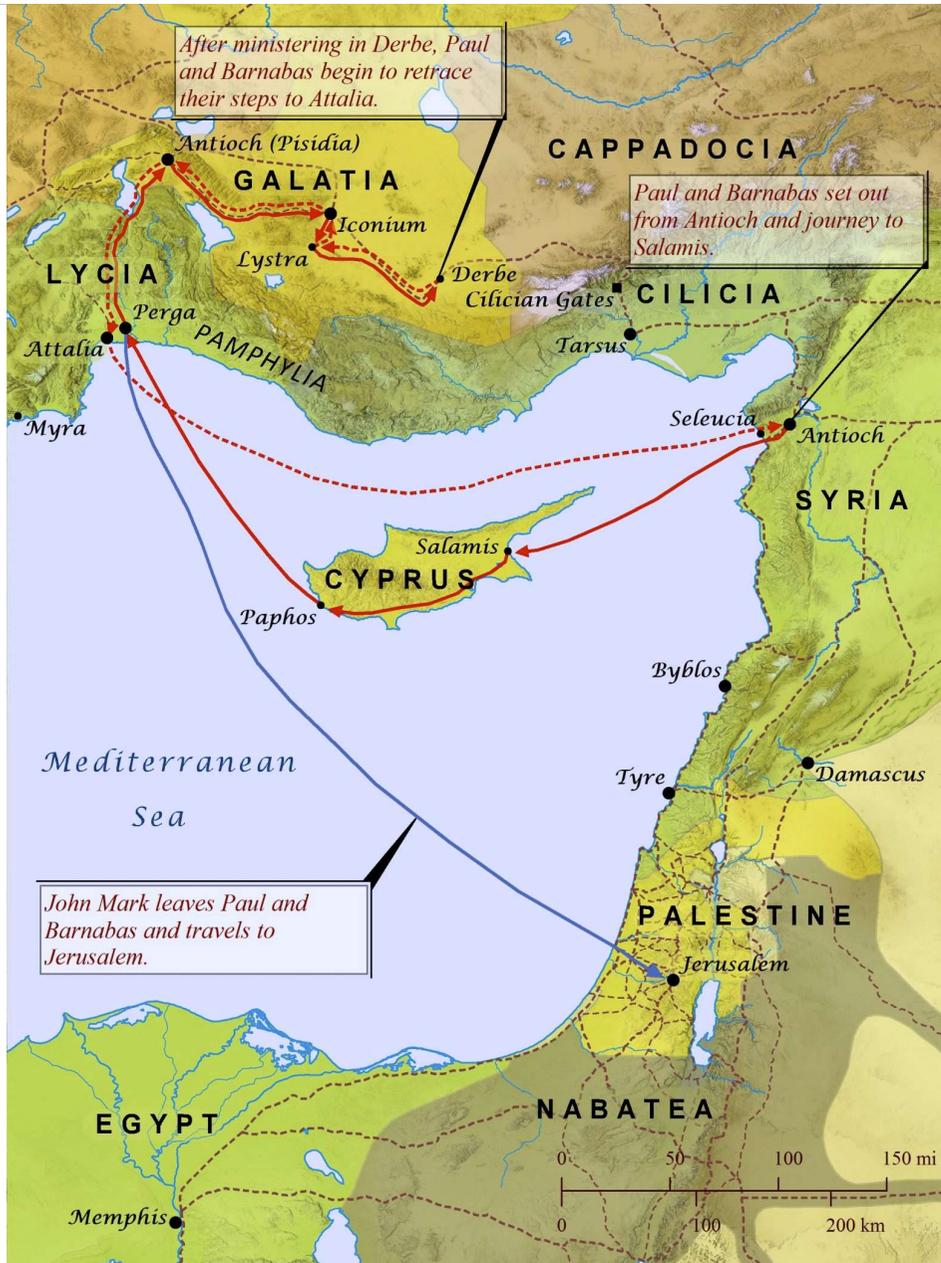
## ▶ The 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey - Barnabas steps back

*“...The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God.” Acts 13:7*

*“<sup>9</sup> Then Saul, who was also called Paul...” Acts 13:9*

*“<sup>13</sup> From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga ...” Acts 13:13*

- At the start Barnabas was the leader, by the time they left Cyprus Paul had become the more prominent member
- Also on Cyprus Saul started using the Roman form of his name - Paul
- Barnabas was humble enough to step aside when he saw Paul was the best person to lead the new mission to the Gentiles



## Paul and Barnabas – 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey

# Return, report and review

## ▶ God used Barnabas and Paul to bring many Gentiles to faith - SUCCESS

*“<sup>26</sup> From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. <sup>27</sup> On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.” Acts 14:26-27*

- John Mark left them halfway along the journey and returned to Jerusalem
- On their return their news encouraged the Antioch church
- However, the next challenge came from within the new church ...

# Standing firm against erroneous doctrine

## ▶ A challenge from within the within the church

*“<sup>1</sup> Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” <sup>2</sup> This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.” Acts 15:1 - 2*

- Barnabas was a Levite and knew Mosaic Law
  - But he'd witnessed the Spirit at work among uncircumcised Gentiles
  - He and Paul stood their ground and had to travel to Jerusalem for advice
  - They presented their successes to the apostles and won the day:
- “<sup>19</sup> “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.” Acts 15:19*

# To err is human – a rebuke from Paul

## ▶ **Barnabas slipped up and followed Peter's lead - not his own experiences**

*“<sup>11</sup> When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. <sup>13</sup> The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.” Galatians 2:11 – 13*

- Peter refused to eat with Gentile Christians
- Barnabas joined in this position
- Paul publicly rebuked Peter (and Barnabas?)

**Note:** I'm not clear whether this occurred before or after the Jerusalem Council

# Honesty in finances

## ▶ **Barnabas supported himself on his missionary excursions (1 Corinthians 9:6)**

- He could have asked for support from the church as an apostle
  - Instead earned his own living whilst on mission
  - In order to offer the gospel freely to the unsaved
  - See 1 Corinthians 9:6, 9:12, 9:1
- 
- Like Paul he considered the only value was in preaching the gospel and money can sour relationships very quickly

# Disagreement and Parting

## ▶ Barnabas and Paul disagree

- Barnabas had a disagreement with Paul that ended their ministry together **(Acts 15:36-41)**
- Barnabas wanted to take John Mark on their next missionary journey, Paul did not because Mark had abandoned them on a previous trip.
- Mark was his cousin, but also, perhaps he was more forgiving than Paul
- Paul eventually described Mark as “useful to me” at the end of his life **(2 Timothy 4:11)**

# A Summary of Lessons from Barnabas Life

- ▶ Showing confidence in people can often bring out the best in them.
- ▶ You may need to humbly step aside to allow someone more gifted to lead.
- ▶ Even if you have a great strength in your life, always temper it in accordance with the spiritual truths as revealed in Scripture.
- ▶ Do not allow fear to prevent you from taking a stand for what is right.
- ▶ When you know it is God's will don't allow peer pressure to alter your course.
- ▶ Maintaining the status quo can be the greatest risk of all!
- ▶ Often, the rewards of stepping out and taking a risk exceed our expectations.
- ▶ Following up and discipling new converts is so important you may need assistance.
- ▶ .



**An extra slide of 'orthodox church thinking about Barnabas**

# Barnabas and Early Church Speculations

- ▶ Tertullian (2<sup>nd</sup> century writer) attributed the Letter to Hebrews to him
- ▶ 'Epistle of Barnabas' (2<sup>nd</sup> century) - considered for a place in the NT
- ▶ Later two other apocryphal books appeared:
  - Acts of Barnabas
  - Gospel of Barnabas
- ▶ Clement of Alexandria (3<sup>rd</sup> century) listed him as one of the '70' disciples Jesus sent out in pairs (**Luke 10:1**)