

The Son of Encouragement

>PART 1



SCAN FOR AUDIO

One Bible character is often underrecognized. This lack of recognition doesn't tarnish his legacy. Instead, it diminishes us, because we are the poorer for not being more familiar with his wonderful story. The Bible describes him as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Acts 11:24).¹ Very few Bible characters receive such words of commendation.

Most don't remember his original name: Joseph.² Let's face it, there are a lot of Josephs in the Bible. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* references fourteen and this Joseph is listed last.³ We remember him best by his nickname: Barnabas. One of the key people in the New Testament, Barnabas is specifically referenced at least twenty-eight times.

There is so much more to Barnabas than just a travelling companion of Paul and the meaning of his nickname, "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36). As a Levite he would have been among the best educated, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. Most importantly, Barnabas' life reflects and demonstrates a profound awareness of those Scriptures. Ellen G. White characterizes him as one "who had liberally contributed of his means to sustain the cause of Christ, and to relieve the necessities of the poor."⁴ Acts 4:37 outlines how he "sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." Surely Acts is highlighting Barnabas' faithful generosity because the very next event portrayed is the deceitful plot of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11). They dishonestly lay a fraction of the property sale proceeds at the apostles' feet, and both ultimately die at the apostles' feet—never to be heard of again in the text. Barnabas, on the other hand, emerges as a heartwarming character.

Barnabas' ministry to Paul is inspirational. After Paul's transforming experience with Jesus on his journey to Damascus, Paul returned to Jerusalem. He was ostracized and viewed with contempt by everyone—except Barnabas (Acts 9:26). Even though Barnabas knew Paul's murderous past,⁵ he reached out to Paul and renewed their acquaintance. When nobody believed Paul and his fabulous story of meeting the ascended Jesus on the way to Damascus, Barnabas did. "He fully believed and received Paul, took him by the hand, and led him into the presence of the apostles."⁶ When Paul had no voice nor credibility and there was a very real danger of his divine calling being thwarted by

fellow believers, Barnabas spoke for and resolutely stood with Paul. Barnabas' advocacy and support empowered Paul. "Soon the voice which had so earnestly disputed with Stephen, was heard in the same synagogue fearlessly proclaiming that Jesus was the Son of God—advocating the same cause that Stephen had died to vindicate."⁷

Paul's fearless proclamation of Jesus in Jerusalem was endangering his life. For his safety, the church leaders arranged for him to return home to Tarsus. There he would remain, safe but obscured.

With few words and little fuss, Luke describes the next meeting of Barnabas and Paul: "So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch" (Acts 11:25–26a). Once again it was the "son of encouragement" who reached out to Paul. Barnabas, at his own expense (1 Cor 9:1-7), travelled from Antioch to Tarsus, likely an overland journey of 148 miles (238 km), over eight travel days. That's a round trip of three hundred miles⁸ or sixteen travel days—no small feat by foot. He made this journey for one reason: to mentor Paul for ministry.

"Working with Barnabas strengthened Paul's conviction that the Lord had called him to work for the Gentile world."⁹ Ellen White, writing of Paul, concludes, "There never lived a more self-denying, persevering worker."¹⁰ Clearly, Barnabas had a powerful influence upon Paul.

What if Barnabas had not made that long journey to find Paul? Without the nurturing of Barnabas, what may have become of Paul's ministry? What could be missing from our Bibles today, if Paul had remained in Tarsus?

As an elder, deacon or deaconess, who can you mentor and encourage, just as Barnabas ministered to Paul? **ED**



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¹ All biblical quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise indicated.
² Identified as Joses in the KJV and NKJV. See Acts 4:36.
³ Siegfried H. Horn, "Joseph," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1979), 618–621.
⁴ Ellen G. White, *Sketches from the Life of Paul* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1883), 36.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
⁷ Ibid., 37.
⁸ Approximately 480 kms.
⁹ Ellen G. White, *Unlikely Leaders* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010), 60.
¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 367.