

A FAST Biblical Portrait: Barnabas ***Encourager and Relationship Builder***

John Kain, 2010

Meet Barnabas, a godly man who exemplifies commitment to the local gathering of Christ-followers: “Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:36-37). He put his money where his heart was, and he invested his life in encouraging fellow believers and reaching out to those who hadn’t yet heard or accepted the truth of God’s love.

Although he was not among the original twelve apostles, Barnabas is traditionally thought to have been among the seventy-two people Jesus commissioned to spread the good news (Luke 10:1-2). And Barnabas is indeed a solid example of the kind of friend and partner in ministry we godly men are called to be.

We do well to learn from Barnabas because he acted on the truth that godly relationships between believers are crucial to effectively doing the Lord’s work in the world. (It’s significant that Jesus sent his disciples off two by two.) Sometimes, however, those relationships are strained by the pressures of the ministry; additional stress results because people in leadership roles tend to hold strongly to their viewpoints. Barnabas, however, found ways to build bridges between his fellow church leaders. He was, for instance, one of the first to welcome Paul, the former persecutor of the early church, into fellowship and ministry.

Barnabas persuaded the Christians in Jerusalem to accept Paul’s claim that he was now a follower of Jesus (Acts 9:26-30). Barnabas was sent to Antioch to investigate news that a great number of non-Jews had turned to Jesus (Acts 11:22), and next time he returned to Antioch with Paul. Later, during a famine in the Roman world, Barnabas and Paul took the Antioch church’s donation to the Jerusalem community.

Barnabas, his cousin John Mark, and Paul traveled to Antioch before setting out together on the first missionary journey of the Christian church (Acts 13:2).

When they returned to Antioch, Barnabas wanted Paul and John Mark to continue on with him, but Paul had a falling out with John Mark, perhaps because John Mark had abandoned them at Perga. In spite of Paul’s extremely forceful character and all the kingdom work they had done

together, Barnabas took Mark's side, demonstrating that he himself was a man of conviction and strength.

When men become polarized in their viewpoints, it is sometimes best to go on separate paths, and apparently this was one of those times: "They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus" (Acts 15:39). Paul chose Silas to be his new partner in ministry, and they went elsewhere to strengthen the churches.

By God's grace, the rifts between Barnabas and Paul and between John Mark and Paul appear to have eventually been healed. Although friendships change and people take different paths, time and the influence of the Holy Spirit enable believers to reach some level of reconciliation.