

I. INTRODUCTION TO BARNABAS: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A. BASIC BACKGROUND

1. Real Name: Joses

- **Meaning of the name “Joses”:**
 - “Joses” (Greek: Ἰωσήφ, IOSĒS) is a variant of “Joseph,” a Hebrew name meaning **“He shall add”** or **“May He (God) increase.”**
 - It was a fairly common Jewish name in the New Testament period.
- **Could he be confused with another “Joses”?**
 - Several men named Joses appear in the New Testament, notably:
 - **Joses, brother of Jesus** (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55).
 - **Joses, son of Mary**, who watched Christ’s crucifixion and burial (Mark 15:40, 47).
 - However, Barnabas is clearly identified separately as a Levite from Cyprus in Acts 4:36, which distinguishes him from these other figures.
- **Why the nickname “Barnabas”?**
 - Acts 4:36 explicitly tells us the apostles nicknamed Joses **“Barnabas,”** clarifying it means **“Son of Consolation”** (Greek: υἱὸς παρακλήσεως, HUIOS PARAKLĒSEŌS).
 - The Greek word **παρακλήσις (paraklēsis)** literally means “encouragement,” “comfort,” “consolation,” or “exhortation.”
 - Thus, “Barnabas” is a transliteration of the Aramaic “Bar” (son) + “nabas” (from Aramaic נְבוּאָה, NEVU’AH, meaning prophecy or exhortation). The apostles saw Barnabas as embodying encouragement, thus giving him this meaningful nickname.

2. Occupation and Origin

- **Levite from Cyprus**
 - Acts 4:36 specifically states, **“And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus.”**
 - This tells us explicitly both his tribal affiliation (Levite—associated traditionally with temple duties and religious instruction) and his geographic origin (Cyprus—a significant Mediterranean island with a notable Jewish community).

3. Family Connection to John Mark

- **“Sister’s son to Marcus” (Colossians 4:10)**
 - Paul identifies Barnabas’s nephew, Mark, in Colossians 4:10: **“Marcus, sister’s son to Barnabas.”**
 - This indicates a familial relationship where Mark was Barnabas’s nephew, specifically through Barnabas’s sister. However, Scripture doesn’t explicitly identify Barnabas’s sister by name.
 - Some speculate Barnabas’s sister could have been “Mary,” mother of John Mark, who appears in Acts 12:12, though the Bible does not directly confirm this connection. It’s important to acknowledge this speculation cautiously.

In short:

Barnabas, originally Joses (“God increases”), got his encouraging nickname from the apostles due to his supportive character. Clearly distinct from other men named Joses, he was a Levite from Cyprus and uncle to the Gospel writer Mark through his sister (whose identity remains uncertain).

B. BARNABAS'S BIG MOMENTS IN ACTS

- **Generous Heart:** He sold his property and gave the entire amount to support the apostles' ministry (Acts 4:36–37).
- **Bridge-builder:** After Saul's (Paul's) dramatic conversion, Barnabas took a big risk and introduced him to the apostles (Acts 9:27).
- **Pastor and Leader:** Sent by the Jerusalem church to Antioch, Barnabas encouraged and strengthened the believers there (Acts 11:22–24).
- **Missionary Journey:** Chosen by the Holy Spirit to spread the Gospel alongside Paul (Acts 13–14).
- **Jerusalem Conference:** Sent along with Paul to the Jerusalem Conference to discuss the implications of the new dispensation of the grace of God (Acts 15:1ff)
- **Conflict and Courage:** After a strong disagreement with Paul about giving John Mark another chance, they went separate ways, yet both continued preaching (Acts 15:36–40).

C. BARNABAS ELSEWHERE IN THE BIBLE

- Paul calls Barnabas an **apostle** and mentions that he had the right to receive financial support for his ministry (1 Corinthians 9:6).
- At one point, even Barnabas struggled when influenced by legalistic pressures, leading Paul to rebuke his hypocrisy (Galatians 2:13).
- Family ties highlighted again by Paul mentioning Barnabas's nephew, Mark (Colossians 4:10).

D. INSIGHTS BETWEEN THE LINES (IMPLICIT OBSERVATIONS)

- Trusted and respected by the apostles, Barnabas clearly had strong integrity and character.
- With Saul before he received the dispensational mystery (Eph. 3:1-12) as well as after.
- Known for generosity, encouragement, patience, and forgiveness.
- Played a crucial role in connecting different groups within the early church (especially Jews and Gentiles).

II. BEYOND THE BIBLE: EARLY TRADITIONS ABOUT BARNABAS

A. EARLY CHRISTIAN OPINIONS (CHURCH FATHERS)

- Some early Christians, like Tertullian, thought Barnabas wrote the book of Hebrews (though most today disagree).
- Clement of Alexandria and Origen both liked and quoted a text called the Epistle of Barnabas, believing it genuinely from him.
- Eusebius, an influential early historian, called this Epistle interesting but "spurious," meaning questionable and not scripture.

B. WHAT'S ACTUALLY IN THE EPISTLE OF BARNABAS?

- Interprets Old Testament rituals and laws as symbols pointing to Christian truths—very allegorical.
 - Example: Circumcision isn't about the body but a changed heart.
 - Food rules symbolize moral purity rather than literal diets.
 - Sabbath represents future heavenly rest, not just a weekly day off.
- Has some strong anti-Jewish sentiments, claiming the Jews misunderstood their own scriptures.
- Ends with moral teaching called the "Two Ways" (Way of Light vs. Way of Darkness).

C. MANUSCRIPTS AND HISTORICAL COPIES

- Main copies include the famous **Codex Sinaiticus** (proportedly 4th century, though potentially a forgery) and later ones like **Codex Hierosolymitanus** (11th century).
- These manuscripts show the Epistle was influential, though ultimately it wasn't widely accepted into the canon.
- Not a single text from the Byzantine family of texts (the basis of the KJV) contains the epistle of Barnabas.
- A problem for those who accept the Critical Text:
 - the inclusion of the epistle of barnabas in what many falsly promote as “oldest and best” begs the question: IF IT IS IN THE OLDEST AND BEST, WHY DON'T YOU ADD IT TO BIBLE TRANSLATIONS BASED ON THAT TEXT?
 - They may argue that accuracy and canonicity are different things. However, this falls apart when they use the same text (Sinaiticus) for the removal of important texts, like Mark 16:9-20.

III. WHY ISN'T BARNABAS'S EPISTLE IN THE BIBLE?

A. EARLY CONTROVERSY AND DISCUSSION

- The Epistle was popular enough to be included in some early manuscripts (like Sinaiticus).
- Church leaders debated whether or not it belonged alongside other scripture.

B. REASONS IT DIDN'T MAKE THE CUT

- Unknown authorship and doubtful authenticity—Barnabas probably didn't write it.
- Strong allegorical interpretations didn't match the teaching style of accepted apostles.
- Anti-Jewish language later viewed as problematic and inconsistent with other New Testament teachings.

C. RELATIONSHIP TO THE TEXTUS RECEPTUS (BASIS OF KJV)

- The Epistle was **never** included in the manuscripts behind the King James Version.
- It wasn't part of the Byzantine manuscript tradition Erasmus and others used in creating the **Textus Receptus**.

D. WHY IT'S STILL TALKED ABOUT TODAY

- Although not scripture, it's valuable historically for understanding early Christian thinking.
- Useful academically, giving insight into how early Christians interpreted the Old Testament and saw themselves distinct from Judaism.

WRAPPING IT UP

- Barnabas himself was a remarkable believer: generous, encouraging, a peacemaker, and missionary.
- The “Epistle of Barnabas” attached to his name illustrates early attempts to understand Christianity's Jewish roots allegorically, though problematic in places.
- Studying Barnabas helps us appreciate the careful way early believers decided what was truly Scripture—and why this matters to us today.

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