

Son of Encouragement (Acts 11:19-26)^a

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Context

1. Previous chapter

- Cornelius and Peter divinely pushed together.
- God spontaneously pours out His Spirit on the Gentiles, baptizing them into the Body of Christ.
- The Jews were completely caught off-guard by this development.

2. Beginning of this chapter

- Peter justified what happened to his Jewish critics back in Jerusalem

3. Today's passage

- Gentiles come to faith within the fledgling church in Antioch

Passage (Acts 11:19-26)

19 Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. **20** But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. **21** And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. **22** Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. **23** When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. **24** For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. **25** Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. **26** And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.¹

Only to the Jews

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1. Who are these “Hellenists” (Ἑλληνιστῶν [Hellēnistās])?

A. Broadly, the term refers to a person who's primary language is Greek: a speaker of Greek.

I. Derived from *hellas*, the Greek term for the nation of Greece.

B. Within the Bible, sometimes it refers to Greek speaking Jews (Acts 6:1; 9:29).

C. Whether "Hellenist" describes a Greek speaker who is ethnically a Jew or Gentile depends upon the context.

D. Passage contrasts preaching to Jews only vs. the Hellenists coming to faith.

E. In this passage, the "Hellenists" (ESV, NKJV) appear to be "Gentiles."

2. Antioch in Syria - first significant "outstation" of Christian belief beyond Jerusalem

A. 300 miles north of Jerusalem

B. Description

. . . the third largest [city] in the Roman Empire behind Rome and Alexandria. Located on the Orontes River 15 miles inland, it was known as Antioch on the Orontes. Beautifully situated and carefully planned, it was a commercial center and the home of a large Jewish community. In spite of the fact that it was a vile city, with gross immorality and ritual prostitution as part of its temple worship, the church at Antioch was destined to become the base of operations for Paul's missionary journeys. The Roman satirist, Juvenal, complained, "The sewage of the Syrian Orontes has for long been discharged into the Tiber." By this he meant that Antioch was so corrupt it was impacting Rome, more than 1,300 miles away.³

3. Importance of timing:

1. Vision given to Peter convinced Peter it was permissible to minister to Gentiles.
2. Events at house of Cornelius preceded this development so the salvation of the Gentiles was not rejected out-of-hand by the Jews in Jerusalem who sent Barnabas.

Barnabas

1. Background

A. Native of Cyprus (Acts 4:36)

B. Levite (Acts 4:36)

- C. Probably one of those saved on the Day of Pentecost (visiting from Cyprus to keep the passover)

2. Character

- A. A good man
- B. Full of the Holy Spirit and faith (like Stephen, Acts 6:5)
- C. Called an apostle (Acts 14:14)
- D. Numbered among the “prophets and teachers” at Antioch (Acts 13:1)

3. An Encourager

- A. Sold land to help fund early believers visiting Jerusalem (Acts 4:37)
- B. Encouraged the fledgling Church at Antioch
- C. Considered trustworthy: along with Paul, was entrusted with offering from Antioch back to poor brethren in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30)
- D. Divinely called out with Paul for first missionary journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor (Acts 13:14)
- E. Like Paul, supported himself to avoid need of support from church at Corinth (1Cor. 9:6)
- F. Returned to Antioch with John Mark, Barnabas' cousin, (Acts 12:25; Col. 4:10)

The Importance of Diversity within the Body of Christ

1. Romans 12:3-8

3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. **4** For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, **5** so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. **6** Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; **7** or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; **8** he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.⁴

- A. Paul emphasizes

- I. Guard against the tendency to elevate our gifting over that of others — believing that what we do is more important.
 - II. Accept and appreciate diversity: “all members do not have the same function . . . having . . . gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us”
- B. The wide-spread problem of “gift projection.”
- I. Do we rejoice that others are gifted *differently than us*?
 - II. Do we appreciate the wisdom of God, Who gives those gifts *as He intends*?
 - III. Or are we found frequently lamenting that others don’t do what we think is most important—“why don’t other believers recognize our primary concerns?”
 - Evangelists - Why isn’t everyone else focused on winning the lost *like I am*?
 - Missionaries - Why isn’t everyone else focused on taking the gospel to foreign lands *like I am*?
 - Teachers - Why isn’t everyone else spending as much time in the Word *as I do*?
- C. Paul and Barnabas illustrate this balancing wisdom of God.

2. Paul: the legal “laser-beam mind”

- A. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch to find Judean sect teaching need for circumcision (Acts [15:2](#))
- B. Peter, and even Barnabas, was carried away by the Judean sect for a time (Gal. [2:11-13](#))
- C. Paul sets both Barnabas and Peter straight!
 - I. Ability to resist Judaizers
 - II. Extremely clear grasp of what was at stake.
 - III. Knowledge of OT
 - IV. Legal/theological mind
 - V. Guts!

D. Letters comprise a greater portion of the NT than any other single author.

3. Barnabas: the encourager

A. Name given by apostles, (son of encouragement, Acts 4:36)

I. Real name was Ἰωσήφ [*Iōsēph*] (Acts 4:36)

II. Called Βαρναβᾶς [*Barnabas*] by the apostles

a. From Hebrew: *bar* (son of) + *nabi* (prophet), in the sense that prophets exhort, encourage, and comfort.

III. Translated “son of encouragement”

IV. “Encouragement” is παρακλήσεως [*paraklēseōs*], from the same two root words used of the “Comforter,” the Holy Spirit: “called alongside.”

V. An “advocate,” “comforter” (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

B. Rejoiced in response to success at Antioch—work which he had no hand in yet (was not jealous).

Calvin:

Barnabas' simplicity is commended to us now the second time, that whereas he might have borne the chiefest swing at Antioch, yet went he into Cilicia that he might fet [fetch] Paul thence, who he knew should be preferred before him. Therefore we see how, forgetting himself, he respecteth nothing but that Christ may be chief; how he setteth before his eyes the edifying of the Church alone; how he is content with the prosperous success of the gospel. Therefore, Barnabas is no whit afraid lest Paul do any whit debase him by his coming, so he glorify Christ.⁵

I. True humility, like John the Baptist exhibited in regard to Jesus rise in importance (John 3:30)

C. Encouragement: a ministry much like Hur and Aaron who held up Moses' arms so that Joshua and Israel could defeat the Amalekites (Ex. 17:8-13)

8 Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. 9 And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand." 10 So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let

down his hand, Amalek prevailed. **12** But Moses' hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. **13** So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.⁶

- I. Many things could be said about this passage, but clearly *dependence on one another and teamwork* are required here by God.
 - a. People of Israel ⇒ Joshua ⇒ Moses ⇒ Aaron & Hur.
- II. People who's area of gifting is narrowly focused or requires considerable focus and intensity often struggle with discouragement.
- D. Handling of John Mark: Barnabas exercised greater patience and grace than Paul in response to John Mark's evident shortcomings (Acts [15:37-39](#))
- E. What if no ministry by Barnabas?
 - I. Equivalent question: What if no ministry by Paul?
 - II. Believed Paul's conversion was genuine and attested his sincerity to the other disbelieving apostles (Acts [9:27](#))
 - III. Sought Paul to teach the young church at Antioch—out of which the all-important missionary journeys went forth.
 - IV. Traveling companion with Paul on earliest outreach.
 - a. Undoubtedly encouraged Paul on numerous occasions.
 - V. In the shadows, compared to Paul, but *foundational* to the Church having any benefit from Paul in the first place!
 - VI. How many behind-the-scenes, relatively unknown giftings will be highlighted on the “big screen” once we reach heaven?

Summary

1. **The Church needs every member of the Body**
2. **The tragedy of Christian absence from the local church**
3. **Appreciate our different gifts and celebrate their development**

4. What if no Paul? ⇒ What if no Barnabas?

5. What if no *you*, what if no *me*? Only God knows the potential loss.

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Endnotes:

1. [NKJV](#), Acts [11:19-26](#)
2. [NKJV](#), Acts [11:19-21](#)
3. [Ref-0038](#), Acts [11:20](#)
4. [NKJV](#), Romans [12:3-8](#)
5. [Ref-0696](#), Acts [11:25](#)
6. [NKJV](#), Exodus [17:8-13](#)

Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0038** John Walvoord and Roy. B. Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983).
- Ref-0696** J. Calvin *Calvin's Commentaries* (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1998).

Links Mentioned Above

- a** - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/35_Acts_11_19-26/index.htm.
- b** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c** - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.