

St. Barnabas

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Barnabas (originally Joseph), styled an Apostle in [Holy Scripture](#), and, like [St. Paul](#), ranked by the [Church](#) with the Twelve, though not one of them; b. of Jewish [parents](#) in the [Island of Cyprus](#) about the beginning of the [Christian Era](#). A [Levite](#), he naturally spent much time in [Jerusalem](#), probably even before the [Crucifixion of Our Lord](#), and appears also to have settled there (where his relatives, the [family](#) of [Mark the Evangelist](#), likewise had their homes — [Acts 12:12](#)) and to have owned land in its vicinity ([4:36-37](#)). A rather late tradition recorded by [Clement of Alexandria](#) ([Stromata II.20](#)) and [Eusebius](#) ([Church History II.1](#)) says that he was one of the seventy Disciples; but Acts ([4:36-37](#)) favours the opinion that he was [converted](#) to [Christianity](#) shortly after Pentecost (about A.D. 29 or 30) and immediately sold his [property](#) and devoted the proceeds to the [Church](#). The Apostles, probably because of his success as a preacher, for he is later placed first among the [prophets](#) and [doctors](#) of Antioch (xiii, 1), surnamed him Barnabas, a name then interpreted as meaning "son of exhortation" or "consolation". (The real etymology, however, is disputed. See Encycl. Bibli., I, col. 484.) Though nothing is recorded of Barnabas for some years, he evidently acquired during this period a high position in the [Church](#).

When Saul the persecutor, later Paul the Apostle, made his first visit (dated variously from A.D. 33 to 38) to Jerusalem after his [conversion](#), the [Church](#) there, remembering his former fierce spirit, was slow to [believe](#) in the reality of his [conversion](#). Barnabas stood sponsor for him and had him received by the [Apostles](#), as the Acts relate ([9:27](#)), though he saw only Peter and James, the brother of the Lord, according to Paul himself ([Galatians 1:18-19](#)). Saul went to his house at [Tarsus](#) to live in obscurity for some years, while Barnabas appears to have remained at [Jerusalem](#). The event that brought them together again and opened to both the door to their lifework was an indirect result of Saul's own [persecution](#). In the dispersion that followed Stephen's death, some Disciples from [Cyprus](#) and Cyrene, obscure men, inaugurated the real mission of the [Christian Church](#) by preaching to the [Gentiles](#). They met with great success among the Greeks at Antioch in [Syria](#), reports of which coming to the ears of the Apostles, Barnabas was sent thither by them to investigate the work of his countrymen. He saw in the conversions effected the fruit of [God's grace](#) and, though a [Jew](#), heartily welcomed these first

[Gentile](#) converts. His mind was opened at once to the possibility of this immense field. It is a [proof](#) how deeply impressed Barnabas had been by Paul that he thought of him immediately for this work, set out without delay for distant Tarsus, and persuaded Paul to go to Antioch and begin the work of preaching. This incident, shedding light on the character of each, shows it was no mere accident that led them to the [Gentile](#) field. Together they laboured at Antioch for a whole year and "taught a great multitude". Then, on the coming of famine, by which [Jerusalem](#) was much afflicted, the offerings of the Disciples at Antioch were carried (about A.D. 45) to the mother-church by Barnabas and Saul ([Acts 11](#)). Their mission ended, they returned to [Antioch](#), bringing with them the cousin, or nephew of Barnabas ([Colossians 4:10](#)), [John Mark](#), the future [Evangelist](#) ([Acts 12:25](#)).

The time was now ripe, it was believed, for more systematic labours, and the [Church of Antioch](#) felt inspired by the Holy Ghost to send out missionaries to the [Gentile](#) world and to designate for the work Barnabas and Paul. They accordingly departed, after the [imposition of hands](#), with [John Mark](#) as helper. [Cyprus](#), the native land of Barnabas, was first evangelized, and then they crossed over to [Asia Minor](#). Here, at [Perge in Pamphylia](#), the first stopping place, [John Mark](#) left them, for what reason his friend [St. Luke](#) does not state, though Paul looked on the act as desertion. The two Apostles, however, pushing into the interior of a rather wild country, preached at [Antioch of Pisidia](#), [Iconium](#), [Lystra](#), at [Derbe](#), and other cities. At every step they met with opposition and even violent [persecution](#) from the [Jews](#), who also incited the [Gentiles](#) against them. The most striking incident of the journey was at [Lystra](#), where the [superstitious](#) populace took Paul, who had just cured a lame man, for Hermes (Mercury) "because he was the chief speaker", and Barnabas for Jupiter, and were about to sacrifice a bull to them when prevented by the [Apostles](#). Mob-like, they were soon persuaded by the [Jews](#) to turn and attack the Apostles and wounded [St. Paul](#) almost fatally. Despite opposition and [persecution](#), Paul and Barnabas made many converts on this journey and returned by the same route to [Perge](#), organizing churches, ordaining [presbyters](#) and placing them over the [faithful](#), so that they felt, on again reaching Antioch in [Syria](#), that [God](#) had "opened a door of [faith](#) to the [Gentiles](#)" ([Acts 13:13-14:27](#); see article [SAINT PAUL](#)).

Barnabas and Paul had been "for no small time" at [Antioch](#), when they were threatened with the undoing of their work and the stopping of its further progress. Preachers came from [Jerusalem](#) with the gospel that [circumcision](#) was [necessary](#) for [salvation](#), even for the [Gentiles](#). The Apostles of the [Gentiles](#), perceiving at once that this [doctrine](#) would be fatal to their work, went up to Jerusalem to combat it; the older Apostles received them kindly and at what is called the Council of [Jerusalem](#) (dated variously from A.D. 47 to 51) granted a decision in their favour as well as a hearty commendation of their work ([Acts 14:27-15:30](#); see articles [COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM](#); [SAINT PETER](#)). On their return to [Antioch](#), they resumed their preaching for a short time. St. Peter came

down and associated freely there with the [Gentiles](#), eating with them. This displeased some disciples of James; in their opinion, Peter's act was unlawful, as against the Mosaic law. Upon their remonstrances, Peter yielded apparently through fear of displeasing them, and refused to eat any longer with the [Gentiles](#). Barnabas followed his example. Paul considered that they "walked not uprightly according to the [truth](#) of the gospel" and upbraided them before the whole church ([Galatians 2:11-15](#)). Paul seems to have carried his point. Shortly afterwards, he and Barnabas decided to revisit their missions. Barnabas wished to take [John Mark](#) along once more, but on account of the previous defection Paul objected. A sharp contention ensuing, the Apostles agreed to separate. Paul was probably somewhat influenced by the attitude recently taken by Barnabas, which might prove a prejudice to their work. Barnabas sailed with [John Mark](#) to [Cyprus](#), while Paul took Silas and revisited the churches of [Asia Minor](#). It is believed by some that the church of Antioch, by its God-speed to Paul, showed its approval of his attitude; this inference, however, is not certain ([Acts 15:35-41](#)).

Little is known of the subsequent career of Barnabas. He was still living and labouring as an Apostle in 56 or 57, when Paul wrote First Corinthians ([9:5-6](#)), from which we learn that he, too, like Paul, earned his own living, though on an equality with other Apostles. The reference indicates also that the friendship between the two was unimpaired. When Paul was a [prisoner in Rome](#) (61-63), [John Mark](#) was attached to him as a disciple, which is regarded as an indication that Barnabas was no longer living ([Colossians 4:10](#)). This seems probable.

Various traditions represent him as the first [Bishop of Milan](#), as preaching at Alexandria and at [Rome](#), whose fourth (?) [bishop, St. Clement](#), he is said to have converted, and as having suffered [martyrdom](#) in [Cyprus](#). The traditions are all late and untrustworthy.

With the exception of [St. Paul](#) and certain of the Twelve, Barnabas appears to have been the most esteemed man of the first [Christian](#) generation. St. Luke, breaking his habit of reserve, speaks of him with affection, "for he was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of Faith". His title to glory comes not only from his kindness of heart, his personal [sanctity](#), and his missionary labours, but also from his readiness to lay aside his Jewish prejudices, in this anticipating certain of the Twelve; from his large-hearted welcome of the [Gentiles](#), and from his early perception of Paul's worth, to which the [Christian Church](#) is indebted, in large part at least, for its great Apostle. His tenderness towards [John Mark](#) seems to have had its reward in the valuable services later rendered by him to the [Church](#).

The feast of St. Barnabas is celebrated on 11 June. He is credited by [Tertullian](#) (probably falsely) with the authorship of the [Epistle to the Hebrews](#), and the so-called [Epistle of Barnabas](#) is ascribed to him by many Fathers.

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