

What Will Barnabas Say?¹

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The church at Antioch had just finished their meal when an elder, an older man with stooped shoulders, stood up. He held up his hands for quiet and looked around at the group. “Brothers and sisters, we have just received some good news from the church in Jerusalem. They’re sending someone to help us,” he said.

Everyone began talking at once. The voices of the eighteen believers blended into a loud roar throughout the home’s one-room living area. All were animated in their discussions with each other.

A deep booming voice shouted above the clamor, “Who are they sending? One of the apostles, like Peter or John?”

Again, they all spoke at once, agreeing with the man’s choices, but also giving their opinion on which of the two would be their favorites. Along with the talking, there was an underlying fervor to see other believers and hear their testimonies.

The elder laughed and shook his head at the commotion. He motioned with his hands, quieting the assembly. “No – not Peter or John. A man named Barnabas should be arriving in a few days.² He is a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. We will be blessed by his visit.”

Everyone sat quiet for a few moments. Nobody had heard of Barnabas.

One young believer leaned over to his dark haired wife. “What do you think Barnabas will say?” he whispered

Barnabas stood on the deck of the Roman merchant ship as it approached the wharf in Antioch harbor which was located on the Orontes River, sixteen miles from the Mediterranean Sea. The harbor was busy. Ships filled with olive oil from Italy were being unloaded while other ships were being loaded with Syrian grain. A Roman navy trireme sat anchored to a dock with its three tiers of oars out of the water. Nearby, a cohort of Roman soldiers stood watch over the dock.

The three hundred mile cruise had been uneventful with no storms and only gentle breezes propelling the ship. But still, Barnabas was eager, almost antsy, to step onto dry land once again. He had spent the three-day trip, pacing back and forth on the galley’s deck, oblivious to everything around him. The other passengers smiled when he walked by, thinking he was tormented by some type of spirit. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

Barnabas was impassioned by an inner desire to know a specific truth about the church at Antioch. It was an obsession for him. Whenever he prayed for the new church, he cried out to God about it. Yet, heaven remained silent on this issue.

His thoughts were interrupted by shouts coming from the wharf.

“Barnabas! Barnabas! Wave your hands at us so we can see you. We have come from the church to greet you.”

¹ Based loosely on Acts 11:22

² Acts 4:36-37

Looking toward the dock, he saw three men waving at the ship. Barnabas went to the ship's fore rail, waved his arms. "I'm Barnabas! It's great to see you, my brothers!" he shouted.

After what seemed like hours, Barnabas disembarked and went running to the threesome. He hugged and greeted them. Introductions were made amidst the noisy clamor of the docks.

But then, Barnabas could not contain himself any longer. He looked at them, with tears streaming down his cheeks. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you first believed?"³

³ Acts 19:2