

# **Son of Encouragement**

By Don Potter

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Most musicians in the church feel they could be considered as modern day Levites. If they wanted to know what was expected of them, they had only to look at what the Levites did in and around the Tabernacle of David and the Temple of Solomon. After studying the Levites in the Old Testament, I wanted to see what was being said about them in the New Testament.

The word "Levite" is only mentioned twice in the New Testament. Once was in Luke 10:32 when Jesus was telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. A Levite was one of the people that passed by the wounded man on the road. The second time was in Acts:

*And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:36-37 NAS)*

Now we have two kinds of Levites to choose from in the New Testament. One that only looks out for himself and another that sells all and dedicates his life for the service of the Lord.

I thought it was very interesting that the disciples changed the name of Joseph, to Barnabas. We usually change the name of someone we know to a name that best describes him. The scriptures go on to say that Barnabas translated means "son of encouragement". "Son of rest" is added to that in the Lexicon. This name change had to have been initiated as a result of what the disciples felt about Barnabas. The fact that Barnabas was a Levite was never mentioned again in the Bible.

I believe the Lord is talking to the Levites of today through these scriptures, and showing that there has been a name change for those who served in the tabernacle and temple of old. If a musician or praise leader considers him or herself a Levite then we all need to look at what a New Testament Levite was truly like.

## **Encouragement**

"Paraklesis" is the Greek word for encouragement and it means "a calling near, summons, (especially for help), importation, exhortation, admonition, comfort, solace". In other words, a person who has a calling to be near another to admonish and help.

The word "sacrifice" or "offering" (as used in a sacrifice of praise), also means to draw near. Drawing near to someone is encouragement to them, and drawing near to God is

encouraging to Him. The sacrifice of praise we make to God is an attempt at drawing near to Him. There is no mention of Barnabas being a musician, but he certainly understood the principal of sacrifice or offering. It is interesting to note the Greek word for "intercessor" is also "parakletos". It also means, "called to one's side, especially called to one's aid". "Consoler" is even mentioned.

### **A Trusted Voice To Leadership**

*"And when he (Paul) had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus". Acts 9:26-27 (NAS)*

After Barnabas encouraged the disciples to trust Paul, they let him preach freely in Jerusalem about Jesus. The Levites of the Old Testament were trusted among the leadership of Israel and were given great responsibility in the governing of the people. This is also a New Testament characteristic of a Levite. A trusted voice among the leadership can only happen when that voice is considered a part of the leadership.

### **Evangelist**

*"So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and {began} speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. And the news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he had come and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and {began} to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain {true} to the Lord; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord." (Acts 11:19-24 NAS)*

It is my belief that anyone who fancies themselves a Levite should be to some degree an evangelist. Verse 24 tells a bit more about the person of Barnabas and evangelist is definitely one of his callings. It was also noted that he was *"a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and having faith"*.

### **Teacher/Church Planter**

*"And he (Barnabas) left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came about that for an entire year they met with the church, and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." (Acts 11:25-26 NAS)*

Barnabas was true encouragement and true help to the work of the Lord. After being sent to Antioch by the disciples he realizes the church needs more than he can give them. In spite of the fact that many were being saved and the church was growing, he dropped everything and went to Tarsus to find Paul and bring him back to teach at this growing church.

It would be hard for me to imagine, in our present time, anyone with an alive, fast growing church, and many gifts to offer that body himself, giving that away to another man. What special gift did this Levite possess that possessing did not concern him? Could a gifted musician give up his position, even in the face of success, to another person because he felt they needed more than he could give?

I won't try to answer that question but just bring to light the fact that those in the scriptures that had a great impact were those without reputation. Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, raised Him from birth and had to have had a powerful impact on His life, and yet all we know of him is the fruit of his life, Jesus. Barnabas may have been the reason Paul was accepted by the disciples, yet all the Bible maps show Paul's ministry trail and not Barnabas's. Enoch walked with God on the earth, and that is all we know about him.

### **Sent By The Spirit**

*"Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was {there} prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus." (Acts 13:1-4 NAS)*

Barnabas and Saul were sent by the Spirit of the Lord. It is no different for a musician; they should be sent or appointed by the Spirit. A Levite who appoints himself to a task, runs the risk of becoming a Pharisee. Let me explain.

Some Bible scholars believe the Pharisees were self-appointed as there is no record of what tribe they are descended from, or who gave them authority. They do know that the original desire of their gathering was to fulfill the law by outward acts of piety, ceremonial washing, fasting, prayer and the like. In short, earning righteousness. If you appoint yourself to lead praise or just decide you're going to play in the band at your church without real proof it is the will of God, you could become the Pharisee of the group.

### **Being Worshipped**

*"And at Lystra there was sitting a certain man, without strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze upon him, and had seen that he had faith to be made well,*

*said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and {began} to walk. And when the multitudes saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us." And they {began} calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker." Acts 14:8-12*

The history of this nation was idol worship. The reason the people wanted to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas was, that's what they always do when they see spiritual power. So it was only natural for them to call Barnabas, (Zeus),"the father of helps" and Paul, (Hermes)"the herald of the gods". There is a warning in these scriptures even for ministries of today. It is interesting to note that the people had labeled Paul and Barnabas accurately, in spite of the fact they characterized them after false gods. Paul really was a herald of the gospel and Barnabas truly had the gift of helps. It is also interesting to note, the word "calling" in verse 12, is the same word used to identify a person's calling into ministry. The people of Lystra were really saying Barnabas and Paul's calling was to be like Zeus and Hermes.

Are you being compared to a famous musician when others try to compliment you? Many may speak of you accurately as a gifted musician, but is God getting the glory for that or is there some icon that you're being compared to?

When I was 17 and 18 years old I played in a top 40 rock band. I would do my best to sing like Ray Charles (a hero for me), and it impressed the people in the small nightclubs we played at. The day we signed a recording contract with a big company, our manager jumped up and said to the head of the company, "Wait till you hear this guy sing like Ray Charles!" Without missing a beat the record executive said, "but there already is a Ray Charles." I never tried to sing like anyone else again.

I told this story for two reasons. First, we are called to be *"imitators of God and Him only"* (Ephesians 5:1). *"Christ is in me, the hope of Glory"* (Colossians 2:27) so what is in me is what I should sound like. The second reason is, there has been an increasing demand for those who are creative to use their abilities to imitate successful people. It is better business to use something "tried and true" than to start with something creative. Musicians of the church must not fall into that trap. God made us as individual as the leaves on the trees, and so is the music and praise that rises to Him. We must be *"imitators of good and not evil"* (3 John.1:11)

### **Stopping Idol Worship**

*"But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them. "And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts*

*with food and gladness." And {even} saying these things, they with difficulty restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them. But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead." (Acts 14:14-19 NAS)*

When we see someone worshiping a wooden statue or a figure made of stone, we know they are mistaken about where they are placing their hope and adoration. But when they begin showing great appreciation for someone who has preached the Word and shown power through the Holy Spirit, we feel their praise is better placed. The people of Lystra were praising Paul and Barnabas for the right reasons but the apostles knew this kind of praise had to stop and God had to be glorified.

One of the consequences of letting others worship you is, when the religious spirit comes, the ones who have been praising you will want to stone you. But they will stone the leader not the helper. Musicians must be extra cautious about inciting praise to themselves. That can come in the form of selfish ambition, or self-promotion.

### **Fought-for Spiritual Freedom**

*"And some men came down from Judea and {began} teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, {the brethren} determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue." (Acts 15:1-2 NAS)*

One of the original jobs of the Levites was to watch for when the cloud of the Lord started to move and blow the trumpet. The Levites have been a part of recognizing a move of the Spirit for a long time. It was still happening here when Paul and Barnabas recognized that God was doing a new thing with the Gentiles. The prophets and worshipers will often be the first to notice a move of the Spirit, and the religious spirit will always try to add a law to the move.

### **Defending The Move Of The Spirit**

*"And when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. "And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same*

*way as they also are." And all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles." (Acts 15:4-12 NAS)*

Peter's revelation may have been the turning point for the Gentiles. Without Barnabas' and Paul's testimony of the works of the Lord among the Gentiles, the idea of salvation could have been much different.

When the Lord brings a spiritual change to a church, the Levites of that church will often be among the first to recognize it. From that point, the testimony of the Spirit is just about all that will ring true, not the debate over the law.

### **Rebuilding The Tabernacle**

*"And after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me. "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. "And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written, 'After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, In order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,'" (Acts 15:13-17 NAS)*

As Paul and Barnabas fought for the Gentiles to be accepted among the brethren, revelation came to James as he quotes the Amos 9:11 scripture. Would these scriptures have been remembered or spoken, if Paul and Barnabas hadn't had the courage to bring the case to the attention of the leadership? No one knows, but needless to say, Barnabas played a role in the salvation of millions of Gentiles.

### **Conclusion**

Barnabas was clearly not the Levite spoken of by Jesus that passed the wounded man lying on the road. (Luke 10:32) He was able to take up the fight for others as should a Levite of today.

There is an entire community of people in the arts that the Lord wants to draw to salvation. The controversy and sometimes uncertainty around these makes them undesirable to the organized church. It is my belief the Levites that are already in the church need to reach out into that community of people and call them in and even fight for them if necessary.

Barnabas was indeed a "get-involved" kind of person. As an encourager, evangelist, teacher, a voice to leadership, and a defender of those suppressed by the religious spirit, he was much more than a musician in the church. You may think of Barnabas as one-in-a-million, but I believe the Lord wants to release a million Levites with the heart of Barnabas, a son of encouragement.