

1 The Letter of Barnabas

1 . 1 A N S W E R S

- 1.1.1 Manuscript tradition—two Greek texts (complete); nine short Greek texts (chapters 5–21) combined with Polycarp; one Latin text (chapters 1–17); quotations in Clement of Alexandria; brief Syriac fragments; reflections in *Apostolic Church Order*; parallel in Didache 1–6
- 1.1.2 Literary form—letter constructed from a homily (or treatise) and a code of conduct
- 1.1.3 Authorship—unknown non-Jewish Christian (name of Barnabas applied for authority)
- 1.1.4 Date—AD 70–135 (probably around AD 96–100)
- 1.1.5 Setting—Egypt (probably Alexandria)
- 1.1.6 Purpose—to support Christian faith with the knowledge of God’s three doctrines
- 1.1.7 Primary elements—redefinition of Judaism; concern for end times; special knowledge
- 1.1.8 Special images—scapegoat; red heifer; Jesus revealed in the number 318
- 1.1.9 Relationship to scripture—primary focus upon thematic collections of Old Testament texts; specific focus upon midrashic and allegorical interpretations of scripture

1 . 2 Q U E S T I O N S

The text of Barnabas appears in numerous places among our collections of ancient manuscripts. Of these instances, there are two complete sources which are considered to be among the primary witnesses for the text:

(a) Our oldest complete copy of the text of Barnabas is contained in **Codex Sinaiticus** (often indicated by the symbol ⸔). This fourth-century manuscript was discovered by the scholar Constan-

1.2.1 Where did we get our text?



tin von Tischendorf in 1844 at Saint Catherine's monastery on Mount Sinai. Here one can find both the Old (in part) and New Testaments, followed immediately thereafter by the texts of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. This manuscript, which has been identified with the Alexandrian textual tradition, suggests that Barnabas was somehow closely associated with manuscript preservation and research in ancient, Christian Egypt. Several later corrections have been made to the manuscript, perhaps from the seventh century.

(b) The second important copy of the text is the Greek version of Barnabas included in **Codex Hierosolymitanus** (previously known as Codex Constantinopolitanus). This **codex** was found in 1873 by Archbishop Philotheos Bryennios of Nicomedia in the Holy Sepulcher Church of Constantinople (modern Istanbul). According to a note which has been preserved together with the **codex**, this copy was written by an otherwise unknown, eleventh-century scribe named Leo. The text has been dated to June 1056. Along with this copy of Barnabas, the manuscript contains a *Synopsis of the Holy Scriptures* that was compiled by **John Chrysostom**, the only complete text of the Didache and Greek versions of 1–2 Clement, the long form of the thirteen letters of Ignatius, and an explanation of the genealogy of Jesus. The text of Barnabas which appears here is very similar to that which appears in **Codex Sinaiticus**, as described above.

The text of Barnabas has been preserved in abbreviated forms elsewhere. Some of these forms are quite important to a clear understanding of the manuscript tradition. They include the following:

(c) Nine Greek texts contain a defective form of Barnabas which is attached to Polycarp's letter to the Philippians. As a result of some scribal error, in each instance the text of Polycarp 1–9 is followed immediately by Barnabas 5–21 without a break, suggesting that the entire work was attributed to the bishop Polycarp. The oldest example of the texts has been traced to the eleventh century. The whole of these manuscripts should undoubtedly be considered together as a family of witnesses, all of which stem from a single manuscript tradition.

(d) There is one Latin version of Barnabas which contains chapters 1–17 only. These chapters are somewhat abbreviated in form in comparison with the longer Greek witnesses. It is not clear whether this is the work of the scribe who translated the text from the Greek or, instead, represents a shortened Greek source itself.

This version was produced in the late second century and has been preserved for us by a ninth-century manuscript (Codex Corbeiensis) which is stored in St. Petersburg, Russia.

(e) In his well-known text of the *Stromateis*, **Clement of Alexandria** quotes at least seven times from Barnabas and uses similar materials upon numerous other occasions. The early church historian **Eusebius of Caesarea** observes that Clement also had written a commentary upon the text, although this work is now lost to us. Clement ascribed a certain scriptural authority to Barnabas and undoubtedly possessed a dependable manuscript version as a result of his close proximity to the famous library of Alexandria.

(f) Fragments of Barnabas 1.1, 19.1–2 and 8, and 20.1 have been preserved in the Syriac language. The value of such a small portion of the text is limited for the purposes of manuscript study.

(g) Some scholars have indicated that portions of the text of Barnabas (specifically 1.1; 19.2a and 9b; 21.2–4) were incorporated into the later Ethiopic *Apostolic Church Order*. While this is possible, it seems more likely that the *Apostolic Church Order* has used parallel materials which are preserved in Didache 1–6.

(h) Barnabas 18–20 contains the so-called Two Ways tradition, which reflects materials which are primarily Jewish in origin. The Two Ways concept was widely regarded throughout the ancient world, where it appears in parallel materials such as **Manual of Discipline** 3.13–4.26 from Qumran and Didache 1–6. Some common heritage is suggested, though it is difficult to trace a firm, historical relationship among these texts. In the case of the Didache early scholars once argued either that Barnabas 18–20 was drawn from Didache 1–6 or that the Didache was dependent upon Barnabas. Most recent authorities agree, however, that the two texts have borrowed from some common source.

The text of Barnabas is offered as a letter or, by virtue of its formal nature, one might refer to it as an epistle. In this respect the text contains all of the classic sections that characterized ancient letters. The reader finds here, for example, an introduction (1.1), a section of appreciation for the reader and the reason for writing (1.2–5), the body or main message of the author (1.6–17.2), a call for ethical behavior (18.1–20.2), and a closing greeting (21.1–9). Authors throughout antiquity utilized this standard letter form, as is illustrated in the letters of Paul in the New Testament.

1.2.2 What form does the text take?

The letter format in which the text of Barnabas currently appears, however, is not original. Instead, some unknown editor has fashioned the current letter by combining two separate literary sources, neither of which was itself a letter. A close examination of the text reveals the presence of the first source in chapters 1–17, which originally served as an ancient essay on the Old Testament scriptures. Most scholars believe that these chapters may even preserve an early form of a homily or sermon. Chapters 18–20 come from a separate tradition, on the other hand, and contain materials associated with the well-known Two Ways pattern of instruction or code of conduct. This form of instruction was commonly used to teach Christians about what it meant to live an appropriate lifestyle. (For another example of this Two Ways pattern, the reader should consult the materials in *Didache* 1–6). Our author, or perhaps a later editor, joined these two sources and added words at either end of the text (1.1–5 and 21.1–9) to produce an extensive treatise within the framework of a letter.

In conformity with the letter format, Barnabas has been carefully crafted to include all of the typical elements of letters from the late first-century period. After the opening words of greeting and thanks for the presence of the spirit among the recipients, an extensive discussion arises around three elements of doctrine and belief—hope and faith, righteousness and judgment, joy and righteousness. These elements form the primary framework upon which selected Christian themes are raised and thereafter discussed. One might consider these materials to form the *statement* of the letter. In response to this discussion, the Two Ways materials that follow serve as a command to the audience to respond appropriately to the themes which have just been offered. One might say that these latter materials form the *charge* of the letter. The reader thus receives a statement of doctrine and faith and thereafter is charged to fulfill the requirements of that statement. In conclusion, the author offers final warnings and blessings to the readers. This pattern of elements appears throughout most letters from antiquity, both in the everyday letters between family members and in the correspondence between royal officials.

1.2.3 *Who was the author?*

The text offers no reliable clues with respect to the actual identity of its author. Of course, it is true that the name “Barnabas” appears at two places in certain manuscripts. The first occurs in the

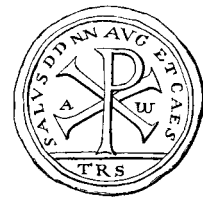
title that opens the text. Scholars generally think that this is a secondary addition, especially since ancient authors typically did not begin their manuscripts with titles—unlike modern authors. The second appearance occurs in the phrase “The Epistle of Barnabas,” which is appended at the conclusion of the text. The tendency to conclude, rather than to begin, a manuscript with a title or **incipit** was common among most ancient texts. The position of the title here thus more authentically reflects ancient literary practices. The question remains, however, whether the use of the name “Barnabas” should be considered as authentic. If so, to whom does the name refer?

Several early Christian writers, including the scholar **Jerome** (in Rome) and both **Clement of Alexandria** and **Serapion of Thmuis** (in Egypt), believed that the author of the text was the apostle Barnabas. We know about Barnabas from the writings of the New Testament, where he is named in Acts 11–15 and Galatians 2 as an early Christian evangelist who accompanied the apostle Paul on the first of his four missionary journeys around the Mediterranean world. Few scholars continue to hold this view today, however, for two primary reasons. The late date of the text suggests that it was almost certainly written after the death of the apostle. Furthermore, the decidedly anti-Jewish tone of the materials would not seem to support its having been written by someone who came from a Jewish background, as did the apostle Barnabas. There are, of course, other ways of explaining the presence of the name, Barnabas.

(a) The author may actually have been named Barnabas, but was someone different from the apostle known from the New Testament. This option is the least likely, primarily since the name is neither widely attested within the ancient church nor often used as a source of authority within early literary traditions.

(b) The letter is a **pseudepigraph**, that is, the author offered the text under the identity of the apostle in order to gain some greater authority for the writing. This practice was widespread among ancient authors who often used the names of great persons either to honor a prominent figure from some historical tradition or to gain acceptance for materials which were believed to be a close reflection of that person’s thought. This is certainly a strong possibility which should not be discounted.

(c) The letter was written anonymously and only later was independently attributed to the apostle Barnabas, most likely in



order to lend some apostolic legitimacy to the writing. As with the second option above, this too is possible and bears equal credibility.

The question of authorship raises the need to define the term *author*. During the rise of the early church, the teachings of important persons and traditions were transmitted both in oral forms and in various written texts. While it is almost certain that much of the material in our work is specifically from a single person, it also is undoubtedly true that the text reflects numerous ancient sources which have been collected to form the basis of the larger document. Our so-called author, therefore, may perhaps be better described by modern standards as a collector or editor. In this respect the person who fashioned the text may be reflected best in the general theology of the work and less so in those sources from which the text borrows.

Apart from the name “Barnabas,” we know nothing about the occupation and status of the author. It is fair to say that the author was respected within the boundaries of the local church, primarily because the text’s broad selection of materials is delivered with an assumption of leadership. At the same time the precise position of authority from which the writing is given remains obscure. Is this a church elder from a neighboring community? Is this an itinerant teacher without any specific home? Is this a leader in the community whose homily or sermon comes from a position of local honor and authority? While there is no consensus on the answer to such questions, this last perspective is the most widely endorsed among scholars today.

Unfortunately, though no definitive answer to the question of authorship is possible, the text suggests that the author (or editor) was a second- or third-generation Christian—not one of the early apostles of the church. In all likelihood this person did not come from a strongly Jewish background. At a later time another person, one who may not even have known the actual identity of the author, borrowed the name of the Jewish apostle Barnabas and applied it to the text in order to gain a broader acceptance for the writing.

1.2.4 When was the text written?

As with the question of authorship, it is difficult to know exactly when the text was written. With respect to the issue of date, however, there are more clues to consider in the discussion. It appears likely that the letter could not have been composed before AD 70. This is supported by the reference in chapter 16 to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The texts supporting this reference

have been borrowed from the Old Testament text of Isaiah, which itself alludes to the earlier destruction of the temple by the Babylonians in the sixth century BC. Undoubtedly, though, this text has been applied here within the fresh context of the war of AD 66–70 between the Jews and Rome, which concluded with the destruction of the temple.

It is also widely recognized that by the third century **Clement of Alexandria** knew this letter well and even endorsed it as scripture. The letter must therefore have gained some authority and obtained wide circulation prior to this time, which roughly represents the final years of Clement's career.

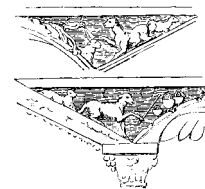
Within these parameters there are three primary theories:

(a) Some scholars believe that the letter should be attributed to the years 70–79. This date is often linked to a passage in chapter 4 based upon the Old Testament book of Daniel that speaks of the rise and reign of ten worldly kingdoms. Presumably the author of Barnabas connected these kingdoms with particular empires in antiquity, much as Revelation 12 does in the New Testament. To assign the letter to these years would provide a proper context for the view that the apostle Barnabas was the actual author.

(b) A more recent, and the most widely supported, theory places the date of composition during the years AD 96–100. This view proposes that both the theological perspectives and historical data within the text indicate a date closer to the end of the first century, or even to the beginning of the second century. Scholars endorsing this perspective favor a date within the reign of the Roman emperor **Nerva** (96–98) or during the opening years of his successor, **Trajan**. Both emperors' attitude toward the growth and spread of Christianity was less hostile than that of their predecessors.

(c) The remaining theory dates the letter to approximately 132–135. This perspective centers once again upon the status of the temple, specifically upon the allusion to its reconstruction in Barnabas 16. Though the text depends upon the imagery of the prophet Isaiah, the allusion may have been employed as a reference to any of the various limited attempts to reconstruct the temple occurring between AD 70–131; after that the entire temple precinct was ultimately destroyed during the second war of the Jews with Rome in 132–135.

Since the evidence is not conclusive for any of these options, it is wise to choose the more moderate opinion which places the writing at the end of the first century. The historical features of



the text are consistent with this period in the growth of the early church. Moreover the stylistic approach and theological concerns of the author are consistent with other contemporary writings, such as the Didache and the letters of Ignatius from the apostolic fathers, as well as the books of Hebrews and Revelation from the New Testament.

1.2.5 In what setting was the text written?

Scholars concur that the text originated in or around the Egyptian city of Alexandria, the second largest city in the Roman Empire. The strongest supporting evidence for this theory is that the Letter of Barnabas had its widest acceptance and use in this area. As stated above, **Clement of Alexandria**, an eminent theologian and scripture scholar in early Christian Egypt, considered this text to bear the authority of scripture. Clement's student **Origen** likewise conferred the status of scripture upon the text and referred to it as a "catholic" (or universally acknowledged) epistle. The fourth-century bishop **Athanasius**, who also was associated with the church in Alexandria, included the text in his list of authoritative writings. Finally, the letter was copied into an important biblical manuscript of the general region, **Codex Sinaiticus**. This **codex** places it and the Shepherd of Hermas immediately after the book of Revelation as an apocalyptic conclusion to the entire collection of early Christian scripture.

An additional piece of evidence that supports the association of the text with the region of Alexandria is the heavy dependence of Barnabas on that approach to scriptural interpretation known as the **allegorical method**—the view that scripture holds a deeper meaning than that which is immediately apparent from a literal reading of the text. The search for allegories in scripture was widely practiced within the large school of Jewish scripture scholars in Alexandria. As illustrated in the work of the Jewish author **Philo**, it was in Alexandria that Jewish theology explored the allegories of scripture as a means of confronting the philosophical challenges of Greek culture. One might consider it to be only natural, therefore, that the allegorical approach to scripture that dominated the work of Jewish scholars in the city should influence early Christian theologians there as well, including both **Clement** and **Origen**, and presumably the author of Barnabas.

A final piece of evidence in support of Alexandria is the author's emphasis upon the concept of *gnōsis*. This Greek term is usually

translated as “knowledge” and suggests a special understanding of life. One of the main purposes of the Letter of Barnabas is to share with the reader this true, secret knowledge of Christianity. Egyptian scholars were widely recognized for their emphasis upon the element of knowledge within Christian theology, so the environs of Alexandria became one of the homes for the early gnostic movement, or **gnosticism**, which gained a wide following within ancient Christianity. While the emphasis upon knowledge as a key to religious understanding was by no means limited to the Alexandrian area, its pervasive presence in the writings of authors from that city seems to recommend the hypothesis of an Alexandrian origin for the text.

According to the author, the text of Barnabas was written for its readers “in order that, together with your faith, you might have perfect knowledge” (1.5). This “knowledge” to which the author makes reference appears to take the form of three so-called *doctrines* or concepts—hope of life, righteousness, and love of joy and happiness—recurring throughout chapters 1–17 as the hinges upon which the text was constructed. These ideas may be summarized briefly:

(a) The “hope of life” exists for each Christian within the specific faith of that individual believer. This idea is explained in the discussion in 2.1–4.5. Here the reader is admonished to hold certain, correct Christian virtues, to make the appropriate personal sacrifice toward God, to participate in fasting with honest integrity, and to be assured that God’s reward for Christian hope will arrive in the near future.

(b) The doctrine of “righteousness” follows next in the discussion in 4.6–12.11. The early Christian concept of righteousness assumed the setting of the ancient lawcourt. That person who was found to be righteous was, in some sense, someone who had been determined by an appropriate judge to be innocent. With respect to Christian faith, our text assumes that the label of righteousness can be awarded to any faithful believer who has withstood the divine judgment of God. The author observes that Israel, which lost its covenant promise because of its lack of obedience to God’s ways, subsequently was not found to be righteous according to divine judgment. For this reason God revealed Christ to all nations through the death of Jesus of Nazareth upon the cross. The reality of

1.2.6 Why was the text written?

this event was foretold by those great figures of the Old Testament who called for faith and obedience to God and who anticipated the imagery of the cross and baptism throughout their prophecies.

(c) Finally, the “love of joy and happiness” stands as a witness to the fact that any particular believer has indeed obtained righteousness in the sight of God. Chapters 13–16, which contain the discussion of this idea, emphasize that the joy of Christians is justified by their claim to be the true heirs of the covenant of Christ, an idea symbolized by the establishment of a new sabbath and a new temple, or a new day and place for the worship of God.



An essential aspect of chapters 1–17 is the focus on what the author perceives to be the *correct* interpretation of the Old Testament scriptures. The goal of this interpretation is to illustrate that the scriptures have always spoken of and anticipated the coming of the messiah who would bring salvation to the world and be the complete revelation of God to humanity. The author of Barnabas insists that this interpretation is not *a* correct way to interpret the scriptures but, instead, is *the* way. Further, the author argues that the Jews have failed to understand the pronouncements of God properly in this respect. Consequently, the Jews are thought to have rejected the Old Testament covenant when it was given to Moses by God at Mount Sinai. A similar desire to distinguish the early Christian faith from its roots in Judaism is typical of late first-century and early second-century Christian writings, much as one finds in the claims of the Gospel of John in the New Testament. Such arguments reveal the difficult situation of an emerging theology which sought to justify its precarious situation among the religions of the Roman Empire through a fresh and novel use of the Old Testament—the traditional, sacred writings of Judaism.

Although the final part of Barnabas (chapters 18–20, and perhaps 21) originally contained no concern for the three doctrines of knowledge, these materials have been added to chapters 1–17 to reinforce the doctrines. The goal of these final chapters is to contrast the dual pathways of light and darkness. In this process the author first lists a number of characteristics present in the life of the person walking in the way of light: humility, faithfulness, truthfulness, modesty, etc. Next, one finds traits of those who walk in the way of darkness: idolatry, arrogance, hypocrisy, pride, etc. The original concern of these materials undoubtedly was to offer a model of ethical behavior which was to guide the lifestyle of Christians. In their current position these materials serve a similar,

though more specific, function: to illustrate an ethical pattern for daily life which is demanded by the message of the three doctrines in the previous chapters.

The place of Christianity among the various religions of the Roman Empire at the end of the first century was tenuous at best. The young Christian movement was only one among numerous philosophies and faiths competing for the attention of peoples around the Mediterranean world. Our author was concerned to reassure his readers that their hopes and expectations with respect to the claims of Christianity were in fact justified. To this end the text utilizes some specific tools in its efforts to encourage the early church: a concern to redefine the faith, history, and symbols of Judaism; an effort to employ the promise of the end times as a catalyst for faith; and a desire to explain the special knowledge that is inherent to Christianity.

*1.2.7 What are
the primary
traits of the text?*

(a) Redefinition of Judaism. The single religious tradition onto which the author attached the claims of Christianity is the faith of Israel, or Judaism. On the one hand, Judaism was one of the few religions within the Roman Empire officially sanctioned by Roman law. On the other, the traditions of Judaism were widely known throughout the Mediterranean world and held claim to an ancient history of belief. The author thus chose to employ the history and traditions of Judaism as a foundation stone upon which to build the new claims of emerging Christianity.

The argument of Barnabas, in essence, is formulated upon the view that God had previously chosen the people of Israel (the Jews) to share in a covenant of salvation. In the revelation of this covenant throughout history, Israel's leaders foretold the coming of God's ultimate reign. This prophecy evoked the symbols of a purity of lifestyle and thought, participation in cleansing baptism, and the sacrifice of God's own son upon the cross. Scripture records the witness of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, the prophets, and even Moses to this vision of the future. Yet the people of Israel were blind to this promise and through disobedience lost their claim to the covenant. Now, according to this witness and the more recent testimony of the apostles of Jesus of Nazareth, this covenant has been made available to all peoples who will believe in its promises. The old institutions and rituals of Judaism have been redefined into new images of understanding about the relationship of God to

those who accept this covenant. In this effort, the numerous images of the Old Testament writings have been carefully manipulated by means of the **allegorical method** to apply to the current situation of the early church.

(b) The promise of the end times (or **eschatology**). Our author emphasizes the rapidly approaching end of time and the resulting urgency for individual faith in response to that moment. This concern is evident in the underlying assumption that all people of the covenant faith, in alignment with God, constantly struggle in opposition to “the Black One” (4.9; 20.1) and his followers. Yet this struggle ensues with the understanding that the promise of ultimate victory does indeed rest with God. This critical premise underlies the numerous ideas of chapters 1–17 and is driven by a form of cosmic **dualism**, that is, the view that the activities of the world are divided between two primary forces—good and evil. Even the concluding chapters of the text (chapters 18–20), which bring an ethical dimension to this belief, insist that the paths of light and darkness are ruled by *angels* who are associated with these forces. As with the **Manual of Discipline** (from Qumran), these angels are under the influence of good and evil respectively. The author insists that the Jews were previously deceived by an evil spirit and, hence, have been led into disobedience against God. While it is not explicitly stated as such, the reader is to assume that the Jews have been steered by an evil spirit into the way of darkness.

In one of the more intriguing portions of the text, chapter 4, the author anticipates a forthcoming crisis within world history which is referred to as the “final scandal.” Here materials from the **apocalyptic literature** of Daniel in the Old Testament (a basis for the book of Revelation in the New Testament as well) trace the rise of “ten wicked kingdoms” in history and the evil beast that will seek to subdue those who have faith in God. The text of Barnabas concludes with a reminder that the final outcome of history will see God as a victorious conqueror. This theme is constantly used both to encourage readers toward vigilance in their chosen course of faith and to motivate those who have not yet decided which path may be better to follow.

(c) Special knowledge. As mentioned above, the theme of knowledge (*gnōsis*) plays a prominent role throughout the text of Barnabas. Because the early church was rooted in Judaism, it searched the Hebrew Scriptures (or Old Testament) for those passages which explained and predicted the coming of Christ in the life and works of



Jesus. As long as the church was viewed by Roman law as a formal religious sect within Judaism, the rise of Christianity was legally secure. But as the followers of Christ were forced away from Judaism's centers of worship (the synagogues), the status of the new religious faith was endangered. Thus, two groups of people which used the same scriptures to justify their relationship with God came to very different conclusions about what those texts implied. The author of Barnabas sought to show that Christianity alone was able to perceive the true knowledge of God's promises within the Hebrew Scriptures, while Judaism had failed in this task and had rejected the words of Jesus and his apostles.

The concern for knowledge in our text raises the broader issue of **gnosticism** within the early church. **Gnosticism**, the belief that there is a secret knowledge which leads to salvation and is available only to select persons, was a focus of debate among early Christian authors; ultimately the later orthodox church condemned it as heretical. Some scholars have asked whether the text of Barnabas was not itself a form of early Christian **gnosticism**. While today one may reject some of the conclusions in the text, especially with regard to the text's harsh tone and the author's use of scripture to defend the Christian faith against Judaism, it would be best not to classify this document among the works of later so-called heresies within the Christian tradition. As the author explains in 17.2, there is yet even more wisdom to be offered about the future, though such wisdom is difficult to understand because this knowledge is contained in parables. In some sense the text of Barnabas is actually an early precursor to the stream of scriptural interpretation in Alexandria and to the trajectory of theological diversity in early Christian Egypt which made this geographical region appear to be doctrinally suspect, especially to the later orthodox church in western Europe. In the mind of our author, however, this knowledge is not so much restricted to a limited number of select persons, since it is available to all who will share the author's faith.

The author intends to illustrate how the entirety of the Old Testament scriptures refers to Christ. Chapters 1–17 focus upon biblical images and theological explanations illustrating the connection between Christ and the biblical tradition. Some of these connections appear to be straightforward, while others do not. Although the text of Barnabas is replete with such images, the following

1.2.8 What special images appear?

examples appear at the heart of our text and are particularly illustrative of the author's approach:

(a) The scapegoat (7.6–11). This image is taken from the acts of **atonement** that were offered on behalf of the people of Israel by their priest Aaron in Leviticus 16. In this passage two goats are selected: one to be sacrificed to God for the sins of the people; the other is to be released into the wilderness for Azazel, a widely recognized demon of the desert. Before the latter goat was sent forth the Israelites were to perform a ritual of **atonement** over it. This ritual included the placement of hands upon the head of the goat, at which time all of the sins of the people were confessed. Through this means the sins of Israel were cast out of the community.

Using the **allegorical method** our author reconfigures the imagery of the Old Testament text into a decidedly Christian understanding. By this means the special knowledge of faith in regard to this passage is shared with the reader. In this instance, for example, the author associates the second goat with the rejection of Jesus by the Jews. Jesus thus is portrayed as having taken upon himself the sins of the world, ultimately being handed over to the power of death. According to the author in 8.7, the moral to this episode is that those persons who see Jesus as the messiah and wish to enter the reign of God must accept his pain and suffering as their own.

(b) The red heifer (8.1–7). The image of the heifer is taken from Numbers 19:1–10. In this passage the God of Israel prescribes a law to Moses and Aaron on behalf of the people of Israel during their wandering journey in the Sinai desert. Here Israel was called upon to find a young heifer without defects, which was to become a sacrifice for the sins of Israel. Once the heifer had been sacrificed, its blood was sprinkled in the direction of the tent of meeting—the place of worship for the wandering Israelites—and the carcass then was ritually burned. Three men were involved in the ceremony—the priest, the man who burned the sacrificed heifer, and the man who gathered its ashes, which were to be used later.

As with the scapegoat imagery above, our author equates the heifer with Jesus by whose blood all Christians receive their salvation. The wood for the fire is said to represent the cross, and the (twelve) boys who sprinkled the blood upon the tent symbolize the twelve apostles who formerly preached the power of the gospel. The employment of such imagery as a basis for Christian theology was common in late first-century Christian literature, as is illustrated by a similar use of the scapegoat and heifer motifs in Hebrews 8–9 in

the New Testament. The author of Barnabas has noted with special care, however, that through such imagery the vague commandments of the scriptures may be plainly understood with the knowledge of faith alone but remain obscure to those who ignore this approach.

(c) Jesus revealed in the circumcision of Abraham and his servants (9.7–9). Of particular interest here is an early Christian concern for **numerology**—the theory of interpretation that asserts that numbers are significant for theological understanding. With this image our author combines the number of Abraham’s household (318 men, Genesis 14:14) together with a passage on circumcision (Genesis 17). For our author, Jesus thus is revealed in the number 318. In most ancient languages, as with the Greek language of our text, numbers are represented by letters. The Greek letter for the numeral 300 is equivalent to the English *T*, which the author believed to signify the cross of Jesus. The numeral 18 was composed of 10 and 8, which in Greek is formed by the letters I and H respectively. The letters IH became significant for our text, since they form the first two letters of the name of Jesus in Greek (= IHΣΟΥΣ), and thus may be perceived as an abbreviation for that name. When these three letters were subsequently combined together (318 = T + IH), the author of Barnabas could argue that the reader now has been provided with the name of Jesus as it was revealed in connection with the cross—an important symbol of Christian theology indeed.

The relationship of Barnabas to the biblical tradition and to New Testament Christianity in general is not entirely clear, though certain outstanding elements may be discerned. The most striking, and perhaps surprising, aspect of the letter’s relationship with the early church is that the text itself was considered to be scripture by many important theologians. This held especially true within the early Egyptian church, where the text was accepted as scripture by scholars who worked in the region of Alexandria and eventually was included in the **Codex Sinaiticus** version of the Bible. This reveals the indisputable respect which ancient church theologians held for the writing, though once again it must be quickly added that this appreciation was primarily regional. There are no additional references to the text outside of the Alexandrian area during the second and third centuries. As time progressed, the geographical area in

1.2.9 How does the text relate to scripture?

which Barnabas was known slowly expanded, though the influence and importance of the writing simultaneously decreased.

As observed above, a most important feature of the text is the way in which it treats Old Testament scripture. In many respects the letter resembles much of the literature in the New Testament. Not least of these similarities is the frequent reference to the “Law and Prophets” of Jewish tradition. Our author uses these references to explain the role and person of Jesus in much the same way as the writers of the New Testament Gospels and Epistles. While it is only upon a limited number of occasions that our text reflects any specific New Testament materials themselves, many of its themes and ideas are similar.

The question of biblical associations ultimately raises the issue of what sources lie behind the text of Barnabas. This question may be answered best once we have divided the text into its two primary sections:

(a) As stated above, chapters 1–17 utilize numerous Old Testament texts. How these texts have been collected is particularly interesting. It is not unusual for Barnabas to begin a quote from the writings of the Prophets and then to attach two or more distinct passages from other biblical writings or from the Old Testament **Apocrypha** without indicating a change of sources. Also, the author of Barnabas seldom identifies any specific prophet, though it probably should be assumed that the first-century reader was able to determine the text in question. This certainly was a convenient means by which the author could quote from many different prophetic writings. At the same time, there appears to be yet another reason for this approach.

Many scholars believe that the author utilized short collections of texts which we now identify as **testimonia**. These collections formed short documents which contained many scriptural citations that often were associated with a common theme. It is presumed that such documents circulated widely in both Jewish and Christian circles during the early period of the church, as is illustrated by their presence in the writings of **Cyprian** and **Gregory of Nyssa**. As a resource, such collections permitted the essential teachings of Christian theology to be easily transmitted. Furthermore, these collections were a ready source of support for the composition of sermons and homilies.



Figure 1-A — POSSIBLE TESTIMONIA IN BARNABAS
(ESPECIALLY FROM GENESIS, PSALMS, AND ISAIAH)

<i>Image</i>	<i>Barnabas</i>	<i>Old Testament Allusions</i>
Sacrifice	2.4–10	Isaiah 1:11–13; Jeremiah 7:22–23; Zechariah 8:17; Psalm 51:17
The stone	6.2–4	Isaiah 28:16; Isaiah 8:14; Isaiah 50:7; Psalm 118:22, 24
Circumcision	9.1–5	Psalm 18:44; Isaiah 33:13; Jeremiah 4:4; Jeremiah 7:2–3; Psalm 33:13; Isaiah 1:2, 10; Isaiah 40:3; Jeremiah 4:3–4; Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 9:25–26
Son of David	12.10–11	Psalm 110:1; Isaiah 45:1
The heir(s)	13.1–7	Genesis 25:12–23; Genesis 48:9; Genesis 48:13–19; Genesis 15:6; Genesis 17:4–5
Sabbath	15.1–9	Psalm 24:3–4; Jeremiah 17:24–25; Genesis 2:2; Psalm 90:4; Genesis 2:2; Psalm 24:4; Isaiah 1:13; Psalm 24:4

Another basis for the belief that **testimonia** contributed to the composition of Barnabas is the presence of peculiarities in some of the quotations. Scholars have attempted to identify the source of these quotations, both with reference to the prophet in question and with respect to the particular manuscript traditions behind the text. On the latter issue the text of Barnabas offers some problems. It is unclear, for instance, whether the majority of quotations were derived from the Hebrew version of the scriptures or from the Greek version (the **Septuagint**). On the one hand, it is entirely possible that our author borrowed from different versions of scripture. But the idea that the author used **testimonia** as a resource would better explain some of these peculiarities.

Finally, the author approaches the Old Testament through a specific form of textual interpretation known as **midrash**. This approach, used commonly among Jewish scholars, offers a unique blend of scriptural citations and theological explanations, typically with little or no regard for the historical circumstances of the texts’

composition. New revelations quickly arose for interpreters who combined various scriptural texts on the basis of key words shared by those texts and then extracted *hidden* interpretations from these new combinations. The **allegorical method** employed in Barnabas was uniquely suited to this approach to scripture. As such, the way in which our author used texts is deeply reminiscent of later work among the scripture scholars of ancient Alexandria, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

(b) As seen above, the Two Ways motif behind chapters 18–20 reflects a common, early Christian tradition that served as a primary foundation for the author of the Didache as well. The Two Ways tradition appeared to be a conscious reflection of the **decatalogue** of Exodus and Deuteronomy, though the unique approaches to scripture undertaken in chapters 1–17 were not applied to these texts. It is assumed that the addition of the Two Ways tradition to the materials of chapters 1–17 was undertaken primarily to provide an ethical reinforcement for the arguments of these chapters. Presumably, the mere presence of materials from the **decatalogue** of Exodus and Deuteronomy was seen as adequate for this purpose without any need to employ the interpretation of **midrash** or the **allegorical method**.

1 . 3 C O N T E N T S

Outline of the Materials

GREETING	1.1
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Conclusion 17.1–2
 THE TWO WAYS 18.1–20.2
 Introduction 18.1–2
 The way of light 19.1–12
 The way of darkness 20.1–2
 CONCLUDING WARNINGS AND BLESSINGS 21.1–9

Greetings! I am grateful for God’s spirit which is in you. And now I write to complete your faith with knowledge.

There are three great doctrines from the Lord: the hope of life; righteousness; and the love of joy and happiness. Seek these truths, since the current days are precarious. The prophets of scripture revealed that cultic sacrifices and fasting are not of real value. Instead, a person’s inward sacrifice and service to the oppressed are to be desired. In these final days we should seek God’s laws and keep from evil.

The covenant of salvation was abandoned by Israel, and now it is ours alone. So let us be deserving in spirit, avoiding wicked ways and keeping God’s commandments, in order to be judged as those who deserve salvation. It was for this reason that the Lord was crucified—for forgiveness of our sins. Those who know this and yet stray deserve to perish. The prophets foresaw this, and the apostles proclaimed it. Thus the Lord has become our foundation stone against which the Jews protest in vain. They lack the wisdom to recognize this creation of a new Israel—the Lord’s new people of faith—who soon will receive the promises that were made to the patriarchs. Indeed, the last shall be first!

Clearly the many images of Moses and the prophets served as metaphors for us in order to foretell the suffering and death of Jesus, to assure our salvation through the circumcision of our hearts, and to warn us to avoid ungodly persons. And often these same figures alluded to the elements of baptism and crucifixion—symbols of that covenant which once before was rejected by Israel and now is offered

Summary of the Argument

to the nations. This is our promise of hope for that day when the wicked shall perish and we shall be made holy. In the same way that the physical temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, so the spiritual temple which has been constructed within us has been built for the Lord. I trust that with my words you can now understand all of these parables of salvation.

Finally, there are two great paths—one leads to light and the other to darkness. The first path requires that one love and glorify God, as well as avoid godless persons. Keep from all evil ways, follow the commandments of God, and maintain a proper household. Share with your neighbor, both as you give to the needy individual and as you contribute to the life of the community. Hate evil and pray with a clean conscience. As for the path of darkness, it is full of evil actions and thoughts, all of which are counter to the way of light. The believer must follow the ordinances of the Lord in order to be glorified in God's reign. This is the reason for the resurrection and the divine judgment.

Leaders, the end is near and the reward is close by! Counsel faithfully and in wisdom. May the Lord be with you.

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