

## The Bible and Barnabas

1. Barnabas is first introduced to the Christian world as a member of the Jewish priestly family of the country of Cyprus. His original name was Joses or Joseph.
  - *Acts 4:36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,*
2. In the providence of the Lord, Barnabas came under the sound of the gospel and was converted reflected in part by his sacrificial giving of his land for the work of the ministry.
  - *Acts 4:36-37 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, [37] Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.*
3. A man with a sensitive soul and a sweet spirit Barnabas became the instrument to bring Saul of Tarsus into the local assembly.
  - *Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.*
4. As Barnabas was a friend of sinners so he was a servant of the Church. When word came that souls were being saved in Antioch, Barnabas was sent to investigate the situation because he was a good man and filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:24).
  - *Acts 11:22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.*
  - *Acts 11:25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:*
5. What Barnabas and Saul found in Antioch was exciting. God was working in the hearts of many. Souls were being saved despite initial opposition and derision. For a whole year Barnabas and Saul ministered to the saints in Antioch. The Lord gave them souls for their labors.
  - *Acts 11:24 "and much people was added unto the Lord."*
6. At the end of a year a monetary relief offering was taken to be sent to Jerusalem to help those who would be affected by the famine predicted by Agabus. In AD 44 the money was entrusted to Barnabas and Saul.
  - *Acts 11:27-30 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. [28] And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. [29] Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send*

*relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: [30] Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*

7. Having delivered the money to the elders in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Saul embarked on a return journey to Antioch but took with them a young man named John Mark.
  - *Acts 12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.*
8. By divine design Barnabas was selected to embark on the First Missionary Journey with Saul.
  - *Acts 13:1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*
  - *Acts 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*
9. Their First Missionary Journey would take them to Cyprus and some of the principal cities in Asia Minor (13:14).
10. At Lystra, because of a miracle performed by Paul, they were taken for gods, the people calling Barnabas Zeus (14:8-12).
  - *Acts 14:8-12 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: [9] The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, [10] Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. [11] And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. [12] And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.*
11. Returning to Antioch, they found the peace of the church disturbed by a certain sect from Judea, who insisted upon the Gentile converts being circumcised.
12. Paul and Barnabas, with others, were sent to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles and elders. They returned to communicate the result of the conference, accompanied by Judas and Silas (15:1-32).
13. As preparations were being made for a Second Missionary journey, a dispute arose between Paul and Barnabas on account of John Mark.
14. Barnabas determined to take Mark with them; Paul was not sure that they should. Apparently John Mark had deserted them during the first journey and it made Paul angry.

15. The contention became so sharp that they separated, Barnabas with Mark going to Cyprus, while Paul and Silas went through Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:36-41).
16. At this point Barnabas disappears from the record of the Acts. Several times he is mentioned in the writings of Paul, but nothing special is noted save that Barnabas was at one time led away by Judaizing zealots.
  - *Galatians 2:13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.*
17. The last reference to Barnabas in the Bible is found in Colossians 4:10 where it is revealed that John Mark was his nephew.
18. Unfortunately, in religious zeal the name of Barnabas has become associated with some fraudulent religious writings of the Church. One such document is called *The Gospel of Barnabas*. Another is called *The Epistle of Barnabas*. It is to *The Gospel of Barnabas* that modern Arabs appeal to validate some of their religious beliefs.

## The Gospel of Barnabas

- Muslims often cite *The Gospel of Barnabas* in defense of Islamic teaching. In fact, it is a best seller in Muslim countries.
- Suzanne Haneef, in her annotated bibliography on Islam, highly recommends it, saying, "*Within it one finds the living Jesus portrayed far more vividly and in character with the mission with which he was entrusted than any other of the four New Testament Gospels has been able to portray him.*"
- It is called "*essential reading for any seeker of the truth.*"
- Typical of Muslim claims is that "*The Gospel of Barnabas is the only known surviving Gospel written by a disciple of Jesus.... [It] was accepted as a Canonical Gospel in the churches of Alexandria up until 325 AD*"
- A central idea in this work is in accord with a basic Muslim claim, namely, that Jesus did not die on the cross. Instead, this book contends that Judas Iscariot was substituted for Jesus (sect. 217).
- Many Muslims have adopted this view; The vast majority of Muslims now believe that someone else was substituted on the cross for Jesus.

### Evidence for the Validity about the Gospel of Barnabas

So what about the authenticity of this alleged *Gospel of Barnabas*. Is it a first-century gospel, written by a disciple of Christ? The evidence is overwhelmingly negative.

- **First of all, the earliest reference to a *Gospel of Barnabas* comes from a fifth-century work, *Decretum Gelasianum* (*Gelasian Decree*, by Pope Gelasius, AD 492-95).**

But even this reference is in doubt because there is no original language manuscript evidence for its existence! By contrast, the New Testament books are verified by over 5,300 Greek manuscripts that begin in the second and third centuries AD.

- **Second, the earliest form of the *Gospel of Barnabas* known is in an Italian manuscript [rather than a Greek or Hebrew mss as might be expected].**

Scholars who have analyzed the work judge it to be produced in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, i.e., 1400 years after the time of Barnabas. Even Muslim defenders of it admit there is no manuscripts of it before the 1500s.

- **Third, this gospel is widely used by Muslim apologists today, yet there is no reference to it by any Muslim writer before the fifteenth or sixteenth century.** Surely they would have used it if it had been in existence but not one Muslim scholar—or anyone else—ever refers to it between the seventh and fifteenth centuries when Muslims and Christians were in heated debate.
- **Fourth, no father or teacher of the Christian church ever quoted it from the first to the fifteenth century.** If *The Gospel of Barnabas* had been considered authentic, it more surely would have been cited many times by some Christian teacher during this long period of time, as were all the other canonical books of Scripture. What is more, had this gospel even been in existence, authentic or not, certainly it would have been cited by someone. But no father cited it during its supposed existence for over 1,500 years!
- **Fifth, sometimes it is confused with the first-century *Epistle of [Pseudo] Barnabas* (c. AD 70-90), which is an entirely different book.**
- **Sixth, the message of the apocryphal *Gospel of Barnabas* is completely refuted by eyewitness first-century documents that possess over five thousand manuscripts to support their authenticity, namely, the New Testament.** For example, its teaching that Jesus did not claim to be the Messiah and that he did not die on the cross-are thoroughly refuted by eyewitness, first-century documents.
- **Seventh, no Muslim should accept the authenticity of *The Gospel of Barnabas* since it clearly contradicts the Qur'an's claim that Jesus was the Messiah.** It claims, "*Jesus confessed, and said the truth; 'I am not the Messiah ... I am indeed sent to the house of Israel as a prophet of salvation; but after me shall come the Messiah'*" (sects. 42, 48). This is flatly contradictory to the Qur'an, which repeatedly calls Jesus the "*Messiah*" [the "Christ"] (cf.5:19,75).
- **Eighth, honest Muslim scholars like Suzanne Haneef, who highly recommends it, have to admit that "*the authenticity of this book has not been unquestionably established*" and that "it is believed to be an apocryphal account of the life of Jesus.**

The book contains anachronisms and descriptions of medieval life in Western Europe that reveal that it was not written before the fourteenth century.

- For example, it refers to the year of Jubilee coming every one hundred years, instead of fifty as it was practiced before this time (*The Gospel of Barnabas*, 82). The papal declaration to change it to every one hundred years was made by the church in AD 1343.

John Gilchrist, in his work titled *Origins and Sources of the Gospel of Barnabas*, concludes that "*only one solution can account for this remarkable coincidence. The author of the Gospel of Barnabas only quoted Jesus as speaking of the jubilee year as coming 'every hundred years' because he knew of the decree of Pope Boniface.*"

He added, "but how could he know of this decree unless he lived at the same time as the Pope or sometime afterwards? This is a clear anachronism that compels us to conclude that the Gospel of Barnabas could not have been written earlier than the fourteenth century after Christ."

- ❑ One significant anachronism is the fact that *The Gospel of Barnabas* uses the text from the Roman Catholic Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible (fourth century AD), even though Barnabas supposedly wrote it in the first century AD
- ❑ Other examples of anachronisms include a vassal who owes a share of his crop to his lord (*The Gospel of Barnabas*, 122), an illustration of medieval feudalism; a reference to wooden wine casks (ibid., 152), rather than wine skins as were used in Palestine; and a medieval court procedure (ibid.,121).
- **Ninth, there are many mistakes and exaggerations in *The Gospel of Barnabas*.**
  - ❑ There are historical mistakes, such as, "Jesus was born when Pilate was governor, though he did not become governor until 26 or 27 AD".
  - ❑ There are also geographical mistakes. For example, Chapter 20 "stated that Jesus sailed to Nazareth," even though it is not on the seashore.[\[20\]](#)
  - ❑ Likewise, *The Gospel of Barnabas* contains exaggerations, such as Chapter 17's mention of 144,000 prophets and 10,000 prophets being slain by Jizebel (in Chapter 18).
- Tenth, one scholars study shows many Islamic elements throughout the text that prove beyond any doubt that a Muslim author, probably a convert, worked on the book. Fourteen such influences are noted. For example, it can be proved that the word "pinnacle" of the temple, where Jesus is said to have preached - hardly a good place! - was translated into arabic by *dikka*, a platform used in mosques.

Norman L. Geisler & Abdul Saleeb conclude, "the Muslim use of *The Gospel of Barnabas* to support their teaching is devoid of evidence to support it. Indeed, its teachings even contradict the *Qur'an*. This work, far from being an authentic first-century account of the facts about Jesus, is actually a late medieval fabrication. The only authentic first-century records we have of the life of Christ are found in the New Testament, and it categorically contradicts the teaching of the *Gospel of Barnabas*. For a further critique of this "gospel" the reader should consult David Sox's excellent book titled, *The Gospel of Barnabas*. "

Addendum

*The Gospel of Barnabas* does not claim to be the book Jesus was supposed to have received and for good reason. There are some major contradictions between "Barnabas" and the Qur'an:

- The Quran (2:29) says that the Heavens are seven in number, while "Barnabas" gives the number as nine (178).
- According to "Barnabas", man is endowed with a free will. (164). On the contrary, man only does what Allah wills him to do (Quran - 76:30, 37:96, 17:13, and 10:99-100).
- Adam was not the first man circumcised (23). Abraham was.
- According to "Barnabas" Mary brought forth her son without pain. This is contradicted by the Quran (19:23).
- The Quran follows the Mosaic law of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth", whereas "Barnabas" says "... ye shall not overcome evil with evil, but rather with good". "Woe unto them that call for vengeance..." "... kiss the hand of those who revile thee, and present gifts to those who persecute thee and strike thee much" (64).
- The Quran approves of polygamy. "*Barnabas*" does not tolerate it (115).
- The Quran condemns eating pork but "*Barnabas*" says "that which entereth into the man defileth not the man, but that which cometh out of the man defileth the man" (32).
- "Barnabas" totally ignores the existence of the prophet John the Baptist
- According to "Barnabas", Jesus expressly denies that he is the Messiah. In the Quran, the only Messiah is Jesus. Still,

And there is more.

- In chapter 82, "Barnabas" makes the jubilee a centenary event. The Jewish jubilee, it will be remembered, was celebrated every 50 years.
- Quotations from Dante are another evidence proving a late authorship of this "gospel". They cannot be accidental coincidences, since they are of great number.

Here is a verse which is clearly a quotation of Dante: "*they go and serve false and lying gods*". "Barnabas" quotes these words in two places (78, 217).

The expression, "raging hunger" (60) is probably another specimen of such a direct quote.

The description of the joys of paradise and the horrors of hell, and the pains which the unbelievers suffer in the latter, recall us to Dante's descriptions of the same. (Compare "Barnabas" 59 and 60 with lines 22 and 103, Canto III of Dante's Inferno).

Stranger still is the coincidence between Dante's 'circles' of hell and those of "Barnabas". "Barnabas" has Jesus saying to Peter: *Know ye therefore, that hell is one, yet hath seven centres one below another. Hence, even as sin is of seven kinds, for as seven gates of hell hath satan generated it; so are there seven punishments therein.* (135) This is exactly what Dante says in Canto V, VI, etc. of his Inferno.

Again, "Barnabas" says that God, having created the human senses, condemned them *"to hell and to intolerable snow and ice"* (106). See Dante's Inferno, Canto XXVIII and III, line 22.

But still stronger evidence that "Barnabas" quotes directly or indirectly from Dante is his description of the *"geography of Heaven"*. Here "Barnabas" agrees with Dante and contradicts the Quran.