

The Epistle of Barnabas

I. Introduction

Due to its ability to “defy any definitive interpretation,” the Epistle of Barnabas has continuously attracted the attention of biblical scholars.¹ As Robinson notes, it has “made its appeal with a success of which the author could hardly have dreamed.”² Although the epistle is not presently included in the New Testament, it was at one time considered to be a work of Scripture by church Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria.³ Clearly an important work of early Christian literature, the epistle has brought about the consistent creation of numerous studies and books.⁴

II. Date

The majority of contemporary scholars believe that the Epistle of Barnabas was in all likelihood composed sometime after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. This majority is also in agreement that the latest possible date for the composition of the epistle is most likely sometime just prior to 130 C.E. Paget, in an effort to support his stance that the epistle could not have been written after 130 C.E. insists that if the epistle had been written after 130 C.E., the author would surely have been aware of the second Jewish revolt,⁵ which occurred between 132 and 135 C.E.⁶ However,

¹ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 1.

² Robinson, *Barnabas, Hermas, and the Didache: Being the Donnellan Lectures Delivered Before the University of Dublin in 1920* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 4.

³ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Mantua: Johannes Schallus, 1479), 6.14.

⁴ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

Paget firmly believes that the author was not in any way aware of the second Jewish revolt. To defend his claim on this matter he explains that the anti-Jewish tone employed by the author throughout the epistle is reason enough to believe that the author, had he written following the second Jewish revolt, would have been sure to incorporate the affair into his epistle as it would have served to strengthen his overarching theme that God does not favor the Jewish people. Nevertheless, scholars, to come to such conclusions, have referred to vv. 4:3-5 and v. 16:4. As many in the field have noted, these passages, provided and discussed below, are highly conducive to reaching a fairly accurate time frame for when this epistle was written.⁷

This is happening. For because of their war, it was destroyed by their enemies. And now the servants of the enemies will themselves rebuild it.⁸ (Barn 16:4)

Grant interprets the above passage as a reference to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. by the Roman army. Using the interpretation that the “it” mentioned by the author in this passage is indeed the Temple, “their enemies” who destroyed “it” are then meant to be understood as the Romans. If this interpretation is indeed correct, the author of the epistle wrote this work sometime following the

⁶ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 7.

⁷ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 9.

⁸ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 71.

destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.⁹

While Ehrman agrees with Grant that v. 16:4 should be recognized as solid evidence that the epistle was written after the destruction of the Second Temple, he reads a great deal more into the verse. According to Ehrman, the author's words in v. 16:4 serve as an indication that the epistle was written when the Temple still lay in ruins in Jerusalem. Furthermore, Ehrman also believes that v. 16:4 supports his belief that hopes for a rebuilt Temple existed during the second century within some Jewish and perhaps Christian circles. Ehrman feels that this hope was dashed, however, during the second Jewish revolt of 132-35 C.E. when the Roman emperor Hadrian barred the Jewish people from Jerusalem, constructed a temple to Zeus where the Jewish Temple once stood, and renamed the city Aelia Capitolina.¹⁰

Nevertheless, as stated previously, v. 16:4 is not the only verse of the epistle used by scholars in their attempts to pinpoint the dating of the epistle. In ch. 4 an additional three other verses are often cited as pertinent to this matter. Here in vv. 4:3-5 the author writes,

The final stumbling block is at hand, about which it has been written, just as Enoch says. For this reason the Master shortened the seasons and the days that his beloved may hurry and arrive at his inheritance. For also the prophet says: Ten kingdoms will rule the earth and a small king will

⁹ Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964), 78.

¹⁰ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 7.

rise up afterwards; he will humble three of the kings at one time. So too Daniel speaks about the same thing: I saw the fourth beast, wicked and strong, and worse than all the beasts of the sea, and I saw how ten horns rose up from him, and from them a small horn as an offshoot; and I saw how he humbled three of the great horns at one time.¹¹ (Barn 4:3-5)

While not all scholars view the above passage, which cites one of Daniel's prophecies,¹² as pertinent to determining more precisely the time frame in which the epistle was written, Paget,¹³ Tugwell,¹⁴ and Glimm¹⁵ all do. As they understand the passage, the "ten kingdoms will rule the earth" statement is meant by the author to imply a line of ten Roman emperors. Assuming Julius Caesar to be the first emperor in this line, the tenth is then unarguably Vespasian, who reigned from 69-79 C.E. Therefore, the three kings who will be humbled "at one time" are Vespasian and his two sons, Domitian and Titus. However, as Domitian and Titus rose peacefully to the throne, and no "small king" needed to come humble them, the prophecy made by Daniel and favored by the author of the epistle was not fulfilled.¹⁶ According to Ehrman, though, the use of vv. 4:3-5 is entirely too problematic to be applied to any serious scholarship concerning the dating of the epistle. This is due to the fact that these

¹¹ Ibid., 21.

¹² Ibid., 7.

¹³ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 9-17.

¹⁴ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 30.

¹⁵ Glimm, et al., *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Christian Heritage, Inc., 1947), 187.

¹⁶ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 30.

verses, as they are quotations from Scripture, do not refer to specific events occurring in the author's own setting.¹⁷ Consequently, it is best interpreted that he was writing before the death of Vespasian.¹⁸

III. Authorship

Although the author of the epistle is considerably outspoken in terms of his interpretation of Jewish Law, he is wholly silent when it comes to identifying himself. Aside from the title that tradition has imparted on the epistle, there is no name whatsoever mentioned by the author himself in the text. As a result, there exists no legitimate way to determine precisely the identity of the author.¹⁹

Despite the fact that the epistle has traditionally been attributed to Paul's New Testament companion known by the name of Barnabas, the vast majority of modern scholars now ascertain that such an authorship simply cannot be the case. Hefele, in defense of this position, argues that chronology and theology provide sufficient evidence to prove why the apostolic Barnabas can never again be seen as the author of the work. As the epistle is strongly believed to have been written sometime after the fall of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. and before the second Jewish Revolt, Hefele ascertains that it would have been chronologically impossible for the New Testament Barnabas to author this work, as he undoubtedly was no longer living. As for the

¹⁷ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 7.

¹⁸ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 30.

¹⁹ Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers: A Translation and Commentary* (vol. III; New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965), 44.

theology of the epistle, Hefele insists that it is not at all consistent with the theology accorded to the New Testament Barnabas, specifically in Gal 2:13. To put it more frankly, the seemingly anti-Jewish interpretation tone of the epistle seems to be quite different from the comparatively conservative outlook ascribed to the New Testament Barnabas.²⁰

While the epistle cannot be accurately attributed to one person in specific, the approximate identity and background of the author can be determined with sufficient accuracy. As Kraft has concluded, the author of the epistle, albeit name unknown, was almost undeniably a Christian teacher.²¹ Furthermore, according to Kleist, the author, prior to being a Christian teacher, was an educated Jewish man of Alexandria.²² Like Kleist, Grant also believes that the author of the epistle is Alexandrian in origin. To defend his belief that the author possesses ideologies that point in general towards an Alexandrian orientation, Grant cites as evidence Clement and Origen's treatment of the epistle as scripture. As he explains, this usage is in favor of an Alexandrian origin, given that there was no mention made of the epistle outside Alexandria in the second and third centuries.²³

²⁰ Hefele, *Das Sendschreiben des Apostels Barnabas* (Tubingen, 1840), 175.

²¹ Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers: A Translation and Commentary* (vol. III; New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965), 44.

²² Kleist, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* (Westminster, Marland: The Newman Press, 1948), 190.

²³ Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964), 79.

IV. Interpretation of the Law

In the Epistle of Barnabas, a great deal of chs. 2-16 is consumed with questions pertaining to the Law and to the covenant.²⁴ It is in this portion of the text, according to Glimm, that the author exposes his major purpose for the epistle, which is “to warn Christian readers against accepting the [Hebrew Bible] in its literal sense, particularly where that meaning seems to indicate the permanent validity of Jewish religious practices.”²⁵ With each chapter the author purposefully discloses and discusses what he feels to be the correct interpretations of the following: sacrifice (ch. 2), fasting (ch. 3), the covenant (ch. 4 and 13), circumcision (ch. 9), dietary laws (ch. 10), the Sabbath (ch. 15), and the temple (ch. 16). Undoubtedly, his comments concerning these issues occupy a significant proportion of the epistle as they appear a great deal throughout this first section.²⁶

However, before one can begin any measure of valuable study of the author’s dealings with these topics, his “persistent and polemic references to ‘them’ (the Jews) and ‘us’ (the Christians)” must be noted.²⁷ Furthermore, it must also be recognized that it is not all unusual for the author, in an effort to present what he deems to be the correct Christian interpretations of practices such as circumcision and dietary laws, to juxtapose these with what he deems to be the incorrect interpretations made by the Jewish people.²⁸ In the opinion of the author, a literal interpretation of the ritual laws is entirely

²⁴ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 51.

²⁵ Glimm, et al., *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Christian Heritage, Inc., 1947), 188.

²⁶ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 51.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

incorrect. Furthermore, he believes that only one covenant exists, and that this covenant was eternally lost by the Jewish people when they turned to worshipping the golden calf. The Christians, on the other hand, have attained this covenant through the death of Christ on the cross (vv. 4:6-8 and vv. 14:1-5). According to the author, it is by the commandments of this correctly interpreted covenant that Christians are to live by.²⁹

The above observations make it quite clear why scholars have come to see the purpose of this epistle as either directly or indirectly concerned with Judaism. While some see the epistle as an attempt by the author on the part of those he is addressing to ward off and fight Judaistic tendencies, others believe that the author feels threatened by Judaism. Still, some scholars reject entirely the belief that the purpose of the epistle is in any way bound up with Judaism.³⁰

The epistle's first section, the longest section, is composed of attempts on the part of the author to explain the past by presenting his readers with Christian interpretations of the Jewish scriptural tradition. His purpose for doing so is to prevent his Christian recipients from failing to correctly interpret the Law, which is, as he believes, what the Jewish people did in the past and are continuing to do.³¹

a. Sacrifice

To begin this first section, the author works to demonstrate that God does not desire sacrifices. Quoting Isa 1:11-13 he writes,

²⁹ Ibid., 52.

³⁰ Ibid., 52.

³¹ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 27.

And so he nullified these things that the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is without the yoke of compulsion, should provide an offering not made by humans.³² (Barn 2:6)

In the opinion of Tugwell, the author's mention here of "the new law" seems to validate the "old law" rather than disrespect it.³³ Furthermore, Tugwell views the author's comments in the above passage as an indication of his belief that the Jewish people were brought into the sacrificial cult due to their disloyalty as purposeful punishment by God. Although he does not fully develop here the hint that the new law "should provide an offering not made by humans," it does become clear later on that the sacrifice of the new law is the sacrifice Christ made of himself on the cross. Nonetheless, on the surface level, what the author is seeking to get across to his fellow Christians here is that the correct interpretation is that God, rather than with sacrifices, is rightly approached with conduct that is morally upright.³⁴

It is also in this portion of the text that the author makes use for the first time of his "us" (meaning the Christians) versus "them" (meaning the Jewish people) terminology. In distinguishing between what God says to the Christians and what God

³² Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 17.

³³ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 27.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

says to the Jewish people, the author further attempts to validate his position that sacrifice is entirely in vain.³⁵ To his people, the Christians, he writes,

For through all the prophets he has shown us that he has no need of sacrifices, whole burnt offerings, or regular offerings.³⁶ (Barn 2:4)

which he then juxtaposes with the following,

And again he says to them: Did I command your fathers who came out from the land of Egypt to offer whole burnt offerings and sacrifices to me? No, this is what I commanded them: Let none of you bear a grudge against your neighbor in your heart, and do not love a false oath.³⁷ (Barn 2:7-8)

The author is seeking to convince his Christian readers that the correct understanding of the Law does not include animal sacrifice as God's desire. As he understands, it is because the Jews completely misread the Law in this regard that they neglected to practice the authentic sacrifice that God intended, which is a right and proper mind-set.³⁸

³⁵ Robinson, *Barnabas, Hermas, and the Didache: Being the Donnellan Lectures Delivered Before the University of Dublin in 1920* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 7-8.

³⁶ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 15-17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁸ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 28-29.

As Tugwell notes, the author's interest here in preventing Christians from practicing the Jewish interpretation of sacrifice is considerably peculiar. This is due to the simple fact mentioned previously that, as the majority of modern scholars believe, he composed the epistle after the destruction of the Temple. Along with the destruction of the Temple came the collapse of the sacrificial system as well. With this reality in mind, why is the author so industriously warning Christians to abstain from sacrifice? Although not for certain, it can be induced that his intentions here are traditionally polemic in nature and meant to stress his collective crusade against Judaizing.³⁹

b. Fasting

Following his efforts to dissuade his readers from partaking in sacrifice, the author abruptly moves on to discussing the issue of fasting. Making use of Isa 58:4-10 in a two-part manner, he discloses first what God says to "them" (the Jewish people) regarding their incorrect practice of fasting, and then he discloses what God says to "us" (the Christians) regarding the correct practice of fasting.⁴⁰ At the very start of ch. 3 the author writes,

And so he speaks to them again concerning these things: Why do you fast for me, says the Lord, so that your voice is heard crying out today?

³⁹ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 29.

This is not the fast I have chosen, says the Lord—not a person humbling his soul.⁴¹ (Barn 3:1)

In this verse, the author of the epistle attacks the literal interpretation of the Law that the Jewish people have adopted in terms of fasting. Like in his previous discussion concerning sacrifice, here too he overtly implies that the Jewish people have entirely failed to correctly interpret God's Law. According to Paget, it is clear that the passage is intended by the author to be polemical in nature.⁴² However, as Horbury observes, even though fasting was indeed a part of Jewish praxis, it did not possess, for whatever reason, a similarly important position within their scriptural tradition. Therefore, perhaps the author's campaign against fasting is to be understood as related to the current Jewish praxis of the time in which he was writing.⁴³ Regardless of his particular reasoning for the attack on fasting, he juxtaposes the above verse with the following, which is attributed to God as well.

But he says to us: See, this is the fast I have chosen, says the Lord.
Loosen every bond of injustice; unravel the strangle hold of coercive agreements; send forth in forgiveness those who are downtrodden; tear up every unfair contract. Break your bread for the hungry. And provide

⁴¹ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 19.

⁴² Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 109.

⁴³ Horbury. "Jewish-Christian Relations in the Epistle of Barnabas and Justin Martyr," in *Jews and Christians: the Parting of the Ways A.D. 70-135* (ed. Dunn; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 324.

clothing for anyone you see naked. Bring the homeless under your roof. And if you see anyone who has been humbled, do not despise him—neither you nor anyone from your children’s household. Then your light will burst forth at dawn, your garments will quickly rise up, your righteousness will go forth before you, and the glory of God will clothe you.⁴⁴ (Barn 3:3-4)

As Tugwell interprets this passage, the purpose of the author of the epistle here is to convince his readers that God’s definition of fasting is something entirely different from the Jewish interpretation. Genuine fasting does not involve abstaining from food and drink. Instead, it involves being charitable towards others.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the author insists that fasting in this genuine manner will prove beneficial to Christians, as the “glory of God” will surround them.

c. Covenant

In ch. 4, the author of the epistle cautions his readers to avoid becoming “like some people” (Barn 4:6).⁴⁶ Clearly the people he is referring to here are the Jews, who have intensified their sins by claiming that the covenant is theirs permanently. By referencing the incident of the Jewish people worshipping the Golden Calf following

⁴⁴ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 19.

⁴⁵ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 29.

⁴⁶ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 23.

their exodus from Egypt, the author's purpose is to inform his readers that the Jewish people, on account of this sin, lost forever their covenant with God.⁴⁷

And so you should understand. And yet again, I am asking you this as one who is from among you and who loves each and every one of you more than my own soul: Watch yourselves now and do not become like some people by piling up your sins, saying that the covenant is both theirs and ours. For it is ours. But they permanently lost it, in this way, when Moses had just received it. For the Scripture says: Moses was on the mountain fasting for forty days and forty nights, and he received the covenant from the Lord, stone tablets written with the finger of the Lord's own hand. But when they turned back to idols they lost it.⁴⁸ (Barn 4:6-8)

By succumbing to idolatry the Jewish people fell short of receiving the covenant God intended to impart upon them. Had they abstained from idol worship, they would have indeed been blessed with receiving it. According to the author of the epistle, however, the loss of the covenant by the Jewish people was not without divine reason. In the following passage, he attempts to enlighten his readers with his interpretation

⁴⁷ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 30.

⁴⁸ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 21-23.

that God's original covenant was broken so that a new covenant through Jesus could be formed.⁴⁹

For the Lord says this: Moses, Moses, go down quickly, because your people, whom you led from the land of Egypt, have broken the law. Moses understood and cast the two tablets from his hands. And their covenant was smashed—that the covenant of his beloved, Jesus, might be sealed in our hearts, in the hope brought by faith in him.⁵⁰ (Barn 4:8)

Although he does chastise the actions of the Jewish people in this section, the main purpose of the author is to convince his Christian readers that what happened to the Jewish people can happen to them as well if they are not careful.⁵¹ Warning against overconfidence he says,

Therefore, we should pay close attention here in the final days. For the entire time of our faith will be of no use to us if we do not stand in resistance, as is fitting for the children of God, both against this present

⁴⁹ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 30.

⁵⁰ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 23.

⁵¹ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 30.

lawless age and against the stumbling blocks that are yet to come.⁵²

(Barn 4:9)

d. Circumcision

The author of the epistle's discussion pertaining to false and true circumcision in ch. 9 is a continuation of his efforts to bring to the attention of his readers the correct interpretation of the Law. Here, as previously, he insists that the Jewish people have interpreted God's Law incorrectly.⁵³ Concerning their misinterpretation in terms of circumcision he says,

But even the circumcision in which they trusted has been nullified. For he has said that circumcision is not a matter of the flesh. But they violated his law, because an evil angel instructed them.⁵⁴ (Barn 9:4)

It should be quite obvious at this point that the "they" the author is referring to in this verse is most definitely the Jewish people. Although God had never intended for circumcision to involve the flesh, the Jewish people always have incorrectly involved the flesh. As they have continuously been mistaken, they have missed God's true

⁵² Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 23.

⁵³ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 36.

⁵⁴ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 45.

intentions for circumcision, and therefore their efforts have resulted in nothing.⁵⁵ As for the true circumcision, the author says,

For he speaks again about the ears, indicating how he has circumcised our hearts. The Lord says in the prophet: They obeyed me because of what they heard with their ears. Again he says: Those who are far off will clearly hear; they will know what I have done. And, circumcise your hearts, says the Lord.⁵⁶ (Barn 9:1)

In the above passage, the author is proposing to his Christian readers that while God never intended a circumcision of the flesh, he did always intend a circumcision of the ears and hearts. Exhorting his readers to hear through their ears and their hearts via true circumcision, the author yet again claims to recognize the correct interpretation of the Law.⁵⁷

In an effort to refute what scholars have determined to be a belief proposed by those within the author's own community that circumcision of the flesh serves as a seal of the covenant, he argues that the practice is by no means exclusive to the Jewish people.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 36.

⁵⁶ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 43.

⁵⁷ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 36.

⁵⁸ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 147.

But you will say: Yet surely the people have been circumcised as a seal of the covenant. But every Syrian and Arab and all the priests of the idols are circumcised as well. So then, do those belong to their covenant? Even the people of Egypt are circumcised!⁵⁹ (Barn 9:6)

Here the purpose of the author is to convince his readers who attempt to defend the literal execution of circumcision to abandon their efforts. By explaining that groups who have never been in covenant with God practice literal circumcision, the author argues that the literal interpretation of circumcision was never truly meant to be a sign of the covenant.⁶⁰ Following this passage, the author then moves to dealing with the issue of Abraham's literal circumcision, which either has, or he assumes will, be questioned by his readers. In v. 9:7 he writes,

Thus learn about the whole matter fully, children of love. For Abraham, the first to perform circumcision, was looking ahead in the Spirit to Jesus when he circumcised, for he received the firm teachings.⁶¹ (Barn 9:7)

According to Paget, the intent of the author in this passage is to impress upon his readers that although Abraham and his household practiced literal circumcision, their doing so was always meant to prophesize Jesus' death on the cross. It should be

⁵⁹ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 45.

⁶⁰ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 147.

⁶¹ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 45.

noted that although he states in v. 9:4 that circumcision as practiced by the Jewish people is of a demonic origin, he has no qualms about making exceptions for literal circumcision when it points to the passion of Christ.⁶²

e. Dietary Law

Without taking a breath, the author of the epistle moves into a discussion concerning dietary regulations in ch. 10. It is his intention here to show that the food laws were yet again never intended to be taken literally.⁶³ At the opening of this chapter he says,

And when Moses said to not eat the pig, or the eagle, or the hawk, or the crow, or any fish without scales, he received three firm teachings in his understanding. Moreover, he said to them in the book of Deuteronomy: I will establish a covenant with this people in my righteous demands. So, then, the commandment of God is not a matter of avoiding food; but Moses spoke in the Spirit.⁶⁴ (Barn 10:1-2)

According to the author, the dietary regulations that the Jewish people dutifully observe came not from God, but from Moses. However, he does not discredit Moses for his contribution of these dietary laws.⁶⁵ Instead he goes on to say that:

⁶² Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 148.

⁶³ Ibid., 149.

⁶⁴ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 47.

⁶⁵ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 36.

And so, Moses received the three firm teachings about food and spoke in the Spirit. But they received his words according to the desires of their own flesh, as if he were actually speaking about food.⁶⁶ (Barn 10:9)

While the author does not debate the fact that dietary laws are laid out in the Jewish scriptural traditions, he does argue that they were never meant to be interpreted as they have been by the Jewish people. Although these commandments exist, the author assures readers that Moses always meant for them to be taken spiritually rather than literally. By including the following passage, he attempts to prove that Moses, in telling people to abstain from certain food items, was in reality making a moral point, as understood by the Psalmist:⁶⁷

How fortunate is the man who does not proceed in the counsel of the impious like the fish who proceed in darkness in the depths and does not stand in the path of sinners like those who appear to fear God but sin like the pig and does not sit in the seat of the pestilent like the birds who sit waiting for something to seize.⁶⁸ (Barn 10:10)

⁶⁶ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 49-51.

⁶⁷ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 37.

⁶⁸ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 51.

f. The Sabbath

In ch. 15 the author of the epistle converses concerning the Sabbath. It should be noted here that for the first time in his dialogue encompassing the Law, he does not differentiate between a correct spiritual interpretation and an incorrect Jewish interpretation. His efforts are instead wholly directed towards exploring God's intended meaning of the Sabbath.⁶⁹ To introduce the topic, he says at the very start of the chapter,

Something is also written about the Sabbath in the Ten Words, which God spoke to Moses face to face on Mount Sinai: Make the Sabbath of the Lord holy, with pure hands and a pure heart.⁷⁰ (Barn 15:1)

By the "Ten Words" phrase the author is referring to the Ten Commandments. Direct in presenting the Sabbath as the third commandment, he is also direct in presenting what he deems to be the proper interpretation of making "the Sabbath of the Lord holy." As Paget has noted, however, the words utilized by the author in this passage do not come close to matching the Greek transcript either in Exodus (v. 20:8) or in Deuteronomy (v. 5:12). Therefore, as most modern scholars agree, the author has drawn from the Decalogue, which Ps 23:4 has influenced.⁷¹ Nonetheless, the author goes on in vv. 15:3-5 to say,

⁶⁹ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 39.

⁷⁰ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 67.

⁷¹ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 168.

This refers to the Sabbath at the beginning of creation: God made the works of his hands in six days, and he finished on the seventh day; and he rested on it and made it holy. Pay attention, children, to what it means that he finished in six days. This means that in six thousand years the Lord will complete all things. For with him a day represents a thousand years. He himself testifies that I am right, when he says: See, a day of the Lord will be like a thousand years. And so, children, all things will be completed in six days—that is to say, in six thousand years.⁷² (Barn 15:3-4)

While the author does accurately quote from Gen 2:2 here, he does not hesitate to utilize Ps 90:4 to insert a detailed exegesis.⁷³ Garnering the attention of his Christian readers with “Pay attention, children,” he presents to them his understanding, although he positions it as fact, that the six days mentioned in the creation story are in all actuality meant to point to the coming of the Lord after six thousand years.⁷⁴ As for the Sabbath he says,

And he rested on the seventh day. This means that when his Son comes he will put an end to the age of the lawless one, judge the impious, and

⁷² Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 57-69.

⁷³ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 39.

⁷⁴ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 169.

alter the sun, moon, and stars; then he will indeed rest on the seventh day.⁷⁵ (Barn 15:5)

According to the author, the Sabbath, which belongs to the conclusion of time, has not yet occurred. When God in the sixth millennium brings to a close all things, however, the Sabbath will ensue. Until this time, therefore, creation will not cease.⁷⁶ Quite thorough in nature, the author does not neglect to discuss the question his readers will surely have: How do you keep the Sabbath holy if it has yet to come? In vv. 15:6-7 he says,

Moreover, it says: Make it holy with pure hands and a pure heart. We are very much mistaken if we think that at the present time anyone, by having a pure heart, can make holy the day that the Lord has made holy. And so you see that at that time, when we are given a good rest, we will make it holy—being able to do so because we ourselves have been made upright and have received the promise, when lawlessness is no more and all things have been made new by the Lord.⁷⁷ (Barn 15:6-7)

As the desire of God, according to the author, is that the Sabbath be kept holy “with pure hands and a pure heart,” it is impossible before the coming of Christ, the end

⁷⁵ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 69.

⁷⁶ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 39.

⁷⁷ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 69.

of times, to keep it holy. In other words, such a moral state, the author believes, cannot be reached until the Lord returns. Therefore, it becomes clear that the author of the epistle, in his absolute rejection of keeping the Sabbath, is, as Paget suggests, genuinely concerned that numerous Christians in his community are finding it tolerable and perhaps appropriate to observe the Sabbath in a Jewish manner.⁷⁸ Convinced that God is not pleased with the Jewish manner of keeping the Sabbath, the author says,

Moreover he says to them: I cannot stand your new moons and Sabbaths.

You see what he means: It is not the Sabbaths of the present time that are acceptable to me, but the one I have made, in which I will give rest to all things and make a beginning of an eighth day, which is the beginning of another world.⁷⁹ (Barn 15:8)

The Jewish people, who have mistakenly assumed that those in covenant are further along than they actually are, are also completely incorrect in the manner in which they keep the Sabbath.⁸⁰ According to the author, their methods are not in any way acceptable to God, and therefore should be entirely abandoned by Christians. In terms of what is acceptable to God before the coming of the actual Sabbath, the author says,

⁷⁸ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 169.

⁷⁹ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 69-71.

⁸⁰ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 40.

Therefore also we celebrate the eighth day with gladness, for on it Jesus arose from the dead, and appeared, and ascended in heaven.⁸¹ (Barn 15:9)

According to the author, Christians, while they await the coming of the true Sabbath, can please God in the mean time. By commemorating the resurrection and ascension of Jesus during their Sunday worship, Christians, unlike the Jewish people, are correctly preparing themselves for the coming of Christ and the subsequent Sabbath.⁸²

Before this discussion can be concluded, however, it must be noted that amongst scholars there exists a debate as to whether or not the author of the epistle is a millenarian. According to some scholars, the author is not a millenarian as he never intended for vv. 3-5 in ch. 15 to refer to a literal one thousand year rule of Christ on earth. Still, other scholars see the author's words in these verses to be representative of progressive thought on the part of the author. As they see it, the author is referring to a temporary rather than to a long-term kingdom ruled by the returned Christ.⁸³ A representative of this second view is Rordorf who also believes that the author of the epistle considers the eighth and seventh days to be one singular event.⁸⁴ According to

⁸¹ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 71.

⁸² Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 169.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁸⁴ Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (London: S.C.M Press, 1968), 93-94.

Paget, however, the true purpose of the author in this portion of the text regarding the Sabbath is not to further either a millenarian or a non-millenarian position, in terms of describing the return of Christ. Instead, his focus here is to contend against a perspective that granted the Jewish Sabbath any merit in the eyes of his Christian readers.⁸⁵

g. The Temple

As stated by Paget, the author's placement of his discussion concerning the Temple in ch. 16 is significant and therefore worthy of mention. In using the temple theme to close the first major section of the epistle, the author better equips those studying his work to come to a correct interpretation of the epistle as a whole. As for the structure of ch. 16, it is quite comparable to that of the author's previous chapters in this section. Before introducing what the author portrays as the correct, Christian interpretation of the Law, he first condemns the interpretation that has been made by the Jewish people.⁸⁶ In vv. 16:1-2 he writes,

I will also speak to you about the Temple, since those wretches were misguided in hoping in the building rather than in their God who made them, as if the Temple actually were the house of God. For they

⁸⁵ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 170-71.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

consecrated him in the Temple almost like the Gentiles do.⁸⁷ (Barn 16:1-2)

In this verse, the author of the epistle reveals clearly his opinion that by placing their trust in a mere building, the Jewish people erred significantly. Instead of condemning the Temple itself, he scorns the attitude of the Jewish people who put their faith in it. As in previous chapters, the author does not hesitate to include what he depicts to be the opinion of God.⁸⁸ In the following verse, referring to Isa 40:12 and 66:1 he says,

But consider what the Lord says in order to invalidate it: Who has measured the sky with the span of his hand or the earth with his outstretched fingers: Is it not I, says the Lord? The sky is my throne and the earth is the footstool for my feet. What sort of house will you build me, or where is the place I can rest? You knew that their hope was in vain!⁸⁹ (Barn 16:2)

God, just as with the numerous other interpretations deemed to be incorrect, has rejected the efforts of the Jewish people in this regard.⁹⁰ Displeased with the confidence

⁸⁷ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 71.

⁸⁸ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 172.

⁸⁹ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 71.

⁹⁰ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 172.

they (the Jewish people) have placed in the physical Temple rather than in him, he, according to the author, now desires for the Christians to learn from the mistake they made.

As has been discussed above, the following verses (vv. 16:3-4), which are indeed important to discovering the author's interpretation of the role of the Temple, have proven to be useful in the dating of the epistle as well (see Dating). Here, however, the primary focus of the discussion will be on the ways in which these verses reveal the author's assessment of the Temple. In vv. 16:3-4 he says,

Moreover he says again: See, those who have destroyed this Temple will themselves build it. This is happening. For because of their war, it was destroyed by their enemies. And now the servants of the enemies will themselves rebuild it.⁹¹ (Barn 16:3-4)

As Tugwell has noted, if the author is referring to the physical Temple in these verses, he in all likelihood was writing sometime after the Romans in 70 C.E. destroyed the Second Temple. If this is assumed to be the case, it can then be hypothesized that the author, being aware of some particular project to re-erect the Temple, feared it could wrongly influence his Christian readers.⁹² Had he not considered reconstruction of the Temple to be a possibility, he would not have taken the time to warn his readers not to place their confidence in it.

⁹¹ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 71.

⁹² Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 173.

Still others such as Lightfoot believe that the author here, instead of referring to a new physical temple, is referring to a new spiritual one. The temple that will be built, according to this interpretation, will be the Church of Christ, which will be built by the Christians, to replace the past version erected and incorrectly glorified by the Jewish people.⁹³ According to Tugwell, however, the author is in all actuality referring to the rebuilding of the physical Temple. To argue his point, Tugwell cites vv. 16:6-10. Here the author states quite clearly in the opinion of Tugwell that a spiritual temple, instead of being made manifest in the future, as Lightfoot's interpretation suggests, is already in existence.⁹⁴

V. Role of the Jewish Scriptural Traditions in Christianity

Following his discussion in ch. 10 concerning the proper interpretation of the dietary laws, the author of the epistle abruptly changes direction in ch. 11.⁹⁵ Beginning here a new section that will continue through ch. 12, the author breaks from his dialogue pertaining to the proper interpretation of Jewish Law to impress upon his readers that the Christian ritual of baptism and the experience of the Cross are both anticipated by the prophets in the Jewish scriptures.⁹⁶ Interestingly enough however, the author never mentions the names of the Jewish scriptural sources to which he refers in this section. In fact, he only once in the entire epistle cites the name of a Jewish

⁹³ Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1893), 241.

⁹⁴ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 40.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹⁶ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 154.

scriptural source (v. 10:2).⁹⁷ Regardless, to introduce this subject matter, the author at the outset of ch. 11 states,

But we should look closely to see if the Lord was concerned to reveal anything in advance about the water and the cross.⁹⁸ (Barn 11:1)

From this brief but informative introduction, it can readily be deduced that by “the water” the author is referring to the institution of baptism and by “the cross” he is referring to the passion of Christ.

a. Baptism

Clearly the issue of baptism having been prefigured in the Hebrew Bible is an issue of great importance to the author as he allocates the majority of an entire chapter to it.⁹⁹ Following the introduction in v. 11:1, as mentioned above, the author of the epistle launches into his discussion “concerning the water” (Barn 11:1).¹⁰⁰ Here he says,

⁹⁷ Muilenburg, "The Literary Relations of the Epistle of Barnabas and the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" (Dissertation (PhD), Yale University, 1929), 87.

⁹⁸ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 53.

⁹⁹ Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 80.

¹⁰⁰ Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers: A Translation and Commentary* (vol. III; New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965), 114.

On the one hand, it is written about the water that Israel will not at all accept the baptism that brings forgiveness of sins, but will create something in its place for themselves.¹⁰¹ (Barn 11:1)

It is the purpose of the author through his statement “it is written” to convince his readers that the Hebrew Bible predicted that the Jewish people would fail to accept “the baptism that brings forgiveness of sins” (v. 11:1).¹⁰² Furthermore, the author also seeks to convince his readers that the Hebrew Bible also predicted that the Jewish people, as a result of this failure, would construct a baptism for themselves. While Windisch interprets the author’s words concerning the baptism that the Jewish people “will create something in its place for themselves” as nothing more than a reference to ritual washing,¹⁰³ Paget disagrees. As evidence for his position that this is not the case, Paget cites the fact that of the nine times the author uses the word *οικοδομεο* in the Greek text of the epistle, he uses all but two of them in the context of the Temple. Paget reasons therefore that it is unlikely that this usage of the verb does not have the Temple as its implicit object.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 53.

¹⁰² Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers: A Translation and Commentary* (vol. III; New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965), 114.

¹⁰³ Windisch. "Der Barnabasbrief," in *Handbuch zum NT. Ergänzungsband: Die Apostolischen Vater III*; Tübingen: Mohr, 1920), 368.

¹⁰⁴ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 154.

In the following two verses (vv. 11:2-3) the author makes use of Jer 2:12, Jer 13, and Isa 16:1-2 respectively. As Paget notes, however, these quotations differ largely from the wording of those found in the LXX. After Windisch spoke on the topic, the bulk of commentators have come to agree that both quotations are indeed connected to a particular source, regardless of whatever it may be. In other words, the author of the epistle is not believed by scholars to have purposefully changed the wording of the Jewish scriptural tradition quotations to suit his purpose, and is instead believed to have honestly relied on a rendition of the quotations that already differed from those found in the LXX. In v. 11:3 Windisch sees solid evidence for this position.¹⁰⁵ Here the author states,

Is my holy mountain, Sinai, a rock that has been abandoned? For you will be like young birds who flutter about after being taken from their nest.¹⁰⁶ (Barn 11:3)

While this verse in the epistle makes mention of Mount Sinai, the verse that corresponds to it in the LXX mentions an entirely different mountain, Mount Zion. Furthermore, the mountain in the epistle is described as holy, whereas the mountain mentioned in the LXX is not. Did the author purposefully alter the text to better present his case? According to Kraft, this is highly improbable, as the ideological efficacy of

¹⁰⁵ Windisch. "Der Barnabasbrief," in *Handbuch zum NT. Ergänzungsband: Die Apostolischen Vater III*; Tübingen: Mohr, 1920), 368.

¹⁰⁶ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 53.

the author would have been weakened by the replacement of Mount Zion with Mount Sinai in his epistle. To support his stance, Kraft argues that it would have been unlikely for the author to willingly classify Mount Sinai as holy, as this would have gone against his anti-Jewish persona. Instead, Kraft believes that the author was “being painfully faithful” to his understood source.¹⁰⁷

Although the author takes a reprieve from the issue of baptism in v. 4-7 to quote from various texts such as Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Psalms, he does resume his discussion in v. 8.¹⁰⁸ Here he says,

Notice how he describes the water and the cross in the same place. He means this: How fortunate are those who went down into the water hoping in the cross, for he indicates the reward will come in its season.¹⁰⁹
(Barn 11:8)

In the above passage, the author of the epistle relies upon Ps 1:3-6. Through his interpretation of these verses in v. 11:8, Barnard believes that the purpose of the author here is to convince his readers that when those who believe in the cross are baptized, they go down into the water full of sins, but rise out of the water bearing the fruit of

¹⁰⁷ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 155.

¹⁰⁸ Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 80.

¹⁰⁹ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 55.

fear in their hearts because they placed their hope in the cross (Jesus).¹¹⁰ Paget is in agreement with this interpretation for he believes that by *ξυλον* (cross) the author is referring to the crucifixion of Jesus and by *υδωρ* (water) he is referring to baptism. Taking his interpretation a step further, Paget also believes that by *μισθον* (reward), the author is referring to the resurrection of Jesus.¹¹¹

In terms of the method of baptism the author is referring to, it is most likely baptism by immersion, rather than baptism by affusion. In light of this, Barnard believes it can be determined that the author understood baptism to be symbolic of the way in which the lives of those who place their faith in Jesus change. To make his point here, Barnard explains that the ascent and descent experienced during baptism by immersion symbolizes, according to the author, the metamorphosis one experiences when they place their hope in Jesus. Those who ascend into the water who have lived lives rife with sin descend from the water completely renewed and blessed with new life because they placed their faith in Christ.¹¹²

Regardless of scholarly interpretations of this portion of the text, the author, in quoting Jewish scripture, is clearly striving to prove to his readers that the Jewish scriptures have always foretold the death of Christ, the true baptism by water, and the resurrection of Christ. While ch. 11 deals with the issue of baptism more than any other issue, the author also discusses the issue of the cross. It is in ch. 12, however, that he deals with this issue in greater detail.

¹¹⁰ Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 80-81.

¹¹¹ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 156.

¹¹² Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 81.

b. The Cross

In ch. 12 the author of the epistle moves forward with a discussion pertaining to the cross, the second of his two topics, which he revealed in v. 11:1. Furthermore, his inclusion of the word *παλιν* in the beginning of ch. 12 serves as an indication, according to Paget, that he was very much aware that he had previously touched upon the topic.¹¹³ Nevertheless, he resumes what he began in v. 11:1 in v. 12:1 when he says,

In a similar way he makes another declaration about the cross in another prophet, who says: When will these things be fulfilled? When a tree falls and rises up, when blood flows from a tree. Again you have a message about the cross and the one who was about to be crucified.¹¹⁴ (Barn 12:1)

Amongst scholars, the citation of this verse has caused a good deal of consternation. Preceding the work of Windisch, the convention was to argue in favor of v. 12:1 being a blend of 4 *Ezra* 4:33 and 5:5. However, as the existence of the words *σταν ξυλον κλιθη και αναστη* are not explained via this position, Windisch propped another argument. According to him, the author's words here are intended to refer to the coming of the end of times and most likely come from 4 *Ezra* 5:4-9 and 6:21-24, which the author has Christianized.¹¹⁵ Recently, however, Danielou has cast off Windisch's

¹¹³ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 157.

¹¹⁴ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 57.

¹¹⁵ Windisch. "Der Barnabasbrief," in *Handbuch zum NT. Ergänzungsband: Die Apostolischen Vater III*; Tübingen: Mohr, 1920), 369.

theory. According to Danielou, the author of the epistle referred to and copied a source that had been Christianized beforehand. Furthermore, he argues that this previously Christianized source must receive credit for the author's connection of the supposed citation with Jesus' death. In other words, the author's interpretation here, according to Danielou, is by no means original.¹¹⁶ The most recent scholarship on this debate, however, comes from Kister, who argues that the author is relied upon an eschatological source that was Jewish in origin. To promote this stance, he posits that the words used in v. 12:1 of the epistle are very similar to those present in a fragment discovered at Qumran. In this fragment, Kister points to a statement credited to God concerning the coming of the end of times. In this source, God says, "a tree shall bend and stand erect." According to Kister, the author of the epistle relied upon this statement to compose the line "when a tree falls and rises up."¹¹⁷ Regardless of which theory is ultimately correct, scholars are in agreement that the primary purpose of the author in v. 12:1 is to make reference to the death of Jesus on the cross and ultimately to his resurrection.¹¹⁸

Following v. 12:1 the author moves into a discussion concerning the battle recorded in Exod 17:8 that took place between the Israelites and the Amalekites. Although the author draws on this account, he also takes license to add numerous extra-biblical details.¹¹⁹ Beginning at v. 12:2 and ending at v. 12:3 the author writes,

¹¹⁶ Danielou, "Un Testimonium sur la Vigne dans Barnabe," no. 50 (1962), 389-399.

¹¹⁷ Kister, "Barn 12:1; 4:3 and 4Q Second Ezekiel," no. 97 (1990), 63-67.

¹¹⁸ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 158.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

And he again tells Moses, when Israel was attacked by a foreign people, to remind those under assault that they were being handed over to death because of their sins. The Spirit speaks to the heart of Moses that he should make a type of the cross and of the one who was about to suffer, that they might realize, he says, that if they refused to hope in him, they would be attacked forever. And so Moses stacked weapons one on the other in the midst of the battle, and standing high above all the people he began stretching out his hands; and so Israel again gained the victory. But then, when he lowered his hands, they began to be killed. Why was that? So that they may know that they cannot be saved unless they hope in him.¹²⁰ (Barn 12:2-3)

In terms of the above passage, Paget argues that the true significance for the author lies in Moses placing one shield on top of another shield and Moses stretching out his hands. While these incidents appear nowhere in the Hebrew Bible, the author, according to Paget, understands them to be indicative of the cross. Furthermore, there exists in this passage two further extra-biblical additions. These are: (1) the purpose of the battle is to remind Israel of the sins it has committed, and (2) if Israel neglects to place its hope in Jesus, war will plague them ceaselessly. According to Wengst, however, these additions made by the author to the Biblical story of the battle are completely irrelevant to the chapter's subject, which is largely the cross.¹²¹ Countering

¹²⁰ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 57.

¹²¹ Wengst, "Tradition und Theologie des Barnabasbriefes," no. 42 (1971), 42.

Wengst's argument, Paget insists on the other hand that the anti-Jewish tone of these additions makes them in every way relevant to the work of the author as a whole, regardless of whether or not they are exclusively pertinent to the subject of this specific chapter.¹²² Regardless, the author continues his discussion of the cross in v. 12:5 saying,

Again Moses makes a type of Jesus, showing that he had to suffer and that he will again give life—this one whom they will think they have destroyed. This type came in a sign given when Israel was falling. For the Lord made every serpent bite them, and they were dying since the act of transgression came by Eve through the serpent. This was to convince them that they will be handed over to the affliction of death because of their transgression.¹²³ (Barn 12:5)

Here the author of the epistle continues ch. 12 with a loose rendition of the tale found in Num 21:6 that concerns a brazen serpent. According to Paget, the brazen serpent is a type of cross that was popular around the time the author was writing. In his rendition of the story, the author promotes his understanding that between the brazen serpent and the story of Eve's temptation there exists a connection. This connection in the mind of the author is due to the fact that both stories include serpents. To the author of the epistle, though, this connection is not unique. Other writers, such as Philo (in

¹²² Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 158.

¹²³ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 57-59.

Agric. 95-101 and *Leg. Alleg.* 2:79-81)¹²⁴ for example, have also drawn connections between the two tales. Furthermore, both Philo and the author of the epistle make comments in their respective works that the command given to Moses to construct a brazen serpent in Num 21:6 contradicts his previously given command to abstain from idolatry.¹²⁵ The comments made by the author on this topic appear in v. 12:6 where he says,

Moreover, even though Moses himself issued this command—You will have no molten or carved image as your god—he himself made one, that he might show forth a type of Jesus. And so Moses made a bronze serpent and displayed it prominently, and he called the people through a proclamation.¹²⁶ (Barn 12:6)

While this verse exposes what Paget believes to be awareness on the part of the author that Moses' creation of a bronze serpent in Numbers contradicts his previous command in Exodus to abstain from idol worship, it more importantly serves as an introduction to the author's main purpose for this section of the chapter, which surfaces in the following verse.¹²⁷ In v. 12:7, the author writes,

¹²⁴ Colson, *Philo I-X with an English Translation* (London: LCL, 1929).

¹²⁵ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 159.

¹²⁶ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 59.

¹²⁷ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 159.

And when they came together they begged Moses to offer up a prayer on their behalf, that they might be healed. But Moses said to them: When any of you is bitten, come to the serpent that is displayed on the tree and hope, in faith, that even though dead, it can restore a person to life; and you will then immediately be saved.¹²⁸ (Barn 12:7)

It is in this verse that the author of the epistle brings his discussion concerning the cross to a climax and ultimately to a close. By “the serpent that is displayed on the tree” the author clearly is referring to Jesus. Via this reference, he seeks to convince his readers that the serpent mentioned in Numbers was always meant to be a reference to Jesus. Furthermore, the dead serpent the author mentions in v. 12:7 is also meant to be a reference to Jesus. According to his vague albeit pertinent analogy here, just as the dead serpent can give life, so too, can the crucified Jesus.¹²⁹

VI. The Two Ways

Following his discussion concerning the Temple in ch. 16, the author of the epistle launches into an extended discussion concerning the Two Ways in chs. 18-20.

¹²⁸ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 59.

¹²⁹ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 160.

In terms of the manner in which he transitions to this section of the text, it is extremely brief.¹³⁰ In the last of ch. 17's only two verses the author writes,

For if I should write to you about things present or things to come, you would not understand, because they are set forth in parables. And so these things will suffice.¹³¹ (Barn 17:2)

According to some scholars, however, it is not the original author of the epistle who transitions to and composes the following portions of the text. For example, Kraft believes that the epistle, like the *Didache*, is a piece of “evolved literature” that exists as it does today due to the combined efforts and contributions of various people, rather than that of one solitary author.¹³² On the other side of the debate stands Muilenburg, however, who believes that the epistle is indeed the work of one author, rather than a resultant compilation of many authors. To defend his stance, Muilenburg explains that the abrupt transition in ch. 17 to the Two Ways material is not evidence at all for multiple authorship simply because other transitions in the style of this one exist elsewhere throughout the text (cf. 11:1; 13:1; 14:1; 16:1; 21:1). Furthermore, Muilenburg believes that the author of the epistle is cognizant that his “practical

¹³⁰ Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964), 76.

¹³¹ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 75.

¹³² Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers: A Translation and Commentary* (vol. III; New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965), 1 .

halakhic gnosis” of the material he is transitioning to “is of a different kind from the allegorical exegesis of the preceding chapters.”¹³³

Nevertheless, scholars are in agreement that the transition employed by the author in ch. 17 is tremendously brief in nature. Unsurprising, though, they do vary in their beliefs pertaining to the origin of the material in the section that is being transitioned to, which concerns the Two Ways of life. In the opinion of numerous scholars, this portion of the epistle possesses remarkable similarities with material found in the Didache, specifically in chs. 1-5. As Barnard explains, scholars have debated and discussed the issue of the exact correlation between these two versions for decades, commencing in the 1920s.¹³⁴ The following discussion pertains to the various interpretations maintained by a variety of scholars regarding this issue.

Grant ascertains that the reality of the relationship between the epistle and the Didache must fall into one of two categories: either the author of the epistle was aware of and drew from the “two ways” material in Did. 1-5, or he and the author of the Didache both were aware of and drew from a common, albeit unknown source.¹³⁵ However, as Barnard points out, not all scholars agree with Grant in this regard. According to Barnard, many English scholars writing in the *Journal of Theological*

¹³³ Muilenburg, "The Literary Relations of the Epistle of Barnabas and the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" (Dissertation (PhD), Yale University, 1929), 113.

¹³⁴ Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 93.

¹³⁵ Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964), 76.

Studies, such as Robinson,¹³⁶ believe that it is indeed quite possible that the work of the author in chs. 18-20 concerning the Two Ways is entirely original and not the product of the author's awareness of a previous work. As evidence for their argument, these four scholars refer to the fact that a pre-Christian Jewish manual comprised of Two Ways material has not been discovered. In other words, how could the author of the epistle have relied upon a source that never existed? Furthermore, these scholars posit that the creator of the Didache relied upon the original material in the epistle to compose his treatise. As evidence for their stance here, they, according to Barnard, point to the fact that the Two Ways material in the epistle is haphazardly organized whereas the Two Ways material in the Didache is presented in a careful and refined manner.¹³⁷ In other words, the Didache's discussion of the Two Ways is, in reality, a processed and resultantly more eloquent format of the original Two Ways material found in the epistle.

Still, other theories pertaining to this debate are worthy of discussion. According to Barnard, the suggestion made by Goodspeed regarding the relationship of the epistle with the Didache is brilliant.¹³⁸ As for his suggestion, Goodspeed posits, like Grant, that the author of the epistle and the author of the Didache both relied upon the same source. Unlike Grant, however, Goodspeed goes a step further in claiming to know the name of this common source. According to him, the source relied upon by both authors was none other than the initial Greek version of the Latin work titled *de doctrina apostolorum*. Goodspeed reaches this conclusion via his belief that the *de doctrina*

¹³⁶ Robinson, *Barnabas, Hermas, and the Didache: Being the Donnellan Lectures Delivered Before the University of Dublin in 1920* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 25.

¹³⁷ Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 93.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

apostolorum possesses primitive traces that render it completely incompatible with being a later translation of Did. 1-5.¹³⁹

While it is beyond our purposes here to delve further into the debate surrounding the origin of the author's material regarding the Two Ways, it should be mentioned, albeit briefly, that the theory posited previously by the English scholars (that there never was in existence a Jewish Two Ways) can no longer be maintained. According to Barnard, this is due to the simple fact that a section titled "Of the Two Spirits in Man" has been discovered in the Qumran Manual of Discipline.¹⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the true value of this section of the epistle moves far beyond the origin of the material. Putting all debate aside, Kleist correctly identifies the Two Ways portion of the text as a "manual of Christian morality."¹⁴¹ With this in mind, no discussion regarding the epistle can be considered complete without a detailed analysis of the ideology that surfaces in chs. 18-21. Writing in the two verses of ch. 18, the author says,

But let us turn to another area of knowledge and teaching. There are two paths of teaching and authority, the path of light and the path of darkness. And the difference between the two paths is great. For over the one are appointed light-bearing angels of God, but over the other angels

¹³⁹ Anglican Theological Review 27 (1945), 239-47.

¹⁴⁰ Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and Their Background* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 93.

¹⁴¹ Kleist, *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1948), 29.

of Satan. And the one is Lord from eternity past to eternity to come; but the other is the ruler over the present age of lawlessness.¹⁴² (Barn 18:1-2)

According to Tugwell, the author of the epistle in vv. 18:1-2 introduces to readers his own unique version of the Two Ways. Clearly Tugwell is not amongst the scholars who maintain that the Two Ways material in the epistle is original. Regardless, as the author believes that the Two Ways are in reality “two ways of teaching and authority,” and that the wrong side is favored by the odds, Tugwell insists that the author’s efforts to promote the way of life in the coming chapter are not at all surprising. In Barn 19:1 the author writes,

Therefore, the Way of Light is this—if anyone who desires to traverse the way to the appointed place is diligent in his works. Therefore, the gnosis which is granted to us to walk in it is of this sort: You shall love him who made you; fear him who formed you; glorify him who redeemed you from death. Be upright in heart and rich in spirit. Do not associate with those who are proceeding in the way of death. Hate everything that is not pleasing to God. Hate all hypocrisy. Do not forsake the Lord’s commandments. Do not exalt yourself, but always be humble-

¹⁴² Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 75.

minded. Do not allow yourself to become arrogant. Do not take glory on yourself. Do not plot wickedly against your neighbor.¹⁴³ (Barn 19:1-3)

As Tugwell notes and as the above passage makes quite evident, the author of the epistle wastes little time before launching into a slew of guidelines and exhortations (the vast majority of which are not mentioned here for the sake of brevity) meant to benefit the morality of his readers. According to Tugwell, the author's purpose for his to-the-point course of action here is to stress at the very onset the importance of forming a genuine commitment to the Way of Life and the motives which encourage such a commitment. Furthermore, Tugwell believes that the author's first precept in v. 19:2 is especially worthy of notice as it picks up two motives that are previously alluded to in the epistle. These motives respectively are fear of God (Barn 1:7) and gratefulness to him (Barn 5:3 and 7:1).¹⁴⁴

For the most part, the material included in the author's discussion of the Two Ways corresponds to what is found in the *Didache* and in the *Doctrina*. However, the Two Ways material in the epistle is presented to readers in an arrangement that differs a great deal from the arrangement of the Two Ways material in these two texts. Nevertheless, there are portions of the Two Ways material in the epistle, which are entirely unique to the author and, according to Tugwell, conducive to the overall theme of his epistle. An

¹⁴³ Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers: A Translation and Commentary* (vol. III; New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965), 137-43.

¹⁴⁴ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 42-43.

example of Two Ways material which is unique to the author and pertinent to his message exists in v. 19:8.¹⁴⁵ Here the author writes,

In so far as you are able, be pure within.¹⁴⁶ (Barn 19:8)

The correct interpretation of v. 19:8, according to Tugwell, is that Christians, according to the author, must continuously seek to live lives of pureness. Therefore, assuming this interpretation to be correct, this verse is a reflection of the author's overarching belief made manifest throughout the epistle that Christians must not become arrogantly and incorrectly convinced, as the Jews were, that God's favor upon them is a guaranteed reality. In an effort to prevent his readers from waning in their efforts to ensure that the favor of God remains upon them, the author writes in v. 19:10,

Think about the day of judgment night and day, and seek out the company of the saints every day, either laboring through the word and going out to comfort another, being concerned to save a life through the word, or working with your hands as a ransom for your sins.¹⁴⁷ (Barn 19:10)

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 43.

¹⁴⁶ Ehrman, *The Apostolic Fathers: Epistle of Barnabas, Papias and Quadratus, Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 79.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 79.

To conclude this portion of the text, and the epistle for that matter, the author includes exhortations and requests for prayers that are conventional of early Christian works such as this. In vv. 21:4-6 he writes,

Again and again I ask you, be your own good lawgivers, remain faithful advisors to yourselves, remove all hypocrisy from yourselves. And may God, the one who rules the entire world, give you wisdom, understanding, perception, knowledge of his righteous demands, and patience. Become those who are taught by God, inquiring into what the Lord seeks from you. And do it, that you may be found in the day of judgment.¹⁴⁸ (Barn 21:4-6)

As this closing passage makes clear, the author of the epistle adamantly refuses to classify himself as a teacher to the very end. As Tugwell suggests, perhaps this is due to the fact that the author wants to in no way reduce the accountability of individual Christians or the position of God for that matter.¹⁴⁹

VII. Conclusion

The Epistle of Barnabas, although it was not written by an eloquent theologian of the early church by any means, is nonetheless significant to early Christian studies due to the message it possesses. Furthermore, of particular importance is the author's attempt in this epistle to show, unlike in any other piece of early Christian literature, the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 83.

¹⁴⁹ Tugwell, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 43.

need for Christians to simultaneously claim the Hebrew Bible as their own and distinguish themselves from the wayward Jewish people.¹⁵⁰ According to Paget, the epistle is also worthy of study due to the fact that it raises questions concerning the various forms of Christianity which fought for authority in the days of the early church. Although the writer of this epistle was less than eloquent, to say the least, he produced a document that was popular following its completion in the second century, and due to its fortuitous endurance, remains so to this day.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹⁵¹ Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas : Outlook and Background* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), 264.

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