

How the Epistle of Barnabas denies the infallibility of the Gospels BARNABAS KNOWS OF NO FOUR GOSPELS

Christians like to argue that the gospels were well known soon after being written and thus must be true for nobody refuted them or said they were nonsense. This is the pivot of their argument that Jesus really existed and really died on a cross and really rose from the dead.

The Epistle of Barnabas was written before 70 AD, because the author revealed awareness of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, and perhaps as late as 200 AD. It could have been written when all four gospels were published but when it contradicts them on every major point this is unlikely. And perhaps more so when it never mentions them. It is certain that Barnabas shows that the early Church did not have anything like the Jesus of the gospels and did not regard the gospels as truly the word of God. Barnabas speaks for that Church and it agreed when it held his book in such esteem that it is still with us today. The book was written in the first century because it is determined to extricate the Church from its Judaism by preventing the Old Testament Law from being taken seriously.

Barnabas is an extraordinary and eccentric work that claims that the Old Testament is not literally true but is an allegory of Christian teaching and salvation history. Barnabas pretends that it is all Christian.

Barnabas seems to quote Mark 2:17 when he says that Jesus came to call sinners not saints. That may just be a coincidence.

Barnabas seems to cite John 3:14,15 when he wrote that man could not look to Jesus to be saved unless Jesus took flesh. He wondered how it could “have been possible for men ever to ‘look on Him and be saved’” if Jesus had never taken flesh.

This is not a reference to John which seems to be quoted but to some book that says then when the Saviour comes men will look on him and be saved. God does not save a person just for looking at Jesus but for looking at him with the eyes of faith. That is what Jesus meant in John for looking at his physical body means nothing. But in Barnabas physically seeing Jesus is necessary. Either Jesus was alive in or after 70 AD or he could be physically seen in visions which would have to be induced perhaps by magic mushrooms or starvation coupled with meditation. Barnabas knew from the Old Testament that bodiless beings could appear. Barnabas knew that Jesus could still be seen even if he had no body. He could be like a ghost. So when Barnabas says that Jesus needed a body to be seen he is just lying unless it is the view that Jesus was not a vision but a symbol that he is attacking. Barnabas wants to shut up heretics who said that Jesus was a spiritual or mental force and not a person. The heretics were denying that Jesus could be seen – they denied then that Jesus existed and were saying that he was only honoured as a myth. Many of these heretics were Gnostics. Gnosticism tended to see the story of Jesus as myths, untrue happenings which have a message for us. They must have seen Jesus as a symbol of liberation and not a person or real power of any kind. Barnabas is telling us that there were people who claimed to be Christians who denied the historical existence of Jesus in his day. And there must have been a lot when he had to start on them in a book about Old Testament interpretation and on ethics which was more than a serious digression.

Barnabas seems to quote Matthew 20:16 as scripture (14). There Jesus said that many are called but not many chosen. But this could have been a saying among Christians that made its way into the gospels. Many religions have used this expression. If Barnabas was likely to quote from the Gospels deliberately he would have revealed his source so he did not know where the saying came from if the gospels had been available.

There is no evidence from Barnabas that the gospels were public and it might indicate that bits of them existed or were known but vaguely as nobody was given free access to the gospels.

Had he known of them he would have used a few clear quotes from them for it must have been obvious to him that he needed evidence that the Old Testament was an allegory. He would not have contradicted Jesus’ level-headed interpretation of the Old Testament if he had encountered the Gospels or any traditions allegedly based on them. Jesus took the Old Testament literally where it was meant to be. Jesus told the Jews to obey the teaching of the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 23 and they took him literally for what other way could they have taken him?

Barnabas did not know that Jesus enjoyed the company of sinners and sent his apostles among them for he banned people from having any contact with bad people. “Shun the company of those who walk in the Way of Death” (19). Some would say he was right for these are completely bad people (20) but who could possibly commit all the sins listed and be totally dangerous? And even if they were completely bad Jesus still said we have to be nice to such. Christians say that this warning is against bad example and only forbids dealings with others that lead you into temptation. If it did it would say so instead of giving the impression it means avoid sinners who revel in their iniquity.

Chapter 7 sees the goat as the symbol of Jesus though Jesus called sinners goats and the saints sheep. He indicated that he

himself was the Lamb of God. This suggests that Barnabas did not have the gospels.

Barnabas says in chapter 17 that he has not left out any teaching that has any bearing on our salvation. Yet he never said that the teaching and authority of the Twelve apostles some of which was allegedly in the form of the gospels was necessary for salvation. His Jesus sent apostles all right (5) but they could have been anybody. Barnabas said that they were the lowest ruffians which was not true of nearly all of them as far as the gospels are concerned. This implies that Barnabas did not acknowledge our twelve apostles and Paul. All these kept the Law after Jesus died so he would not have meant them for he believed that it was heresy to take the Law literally like they did. Barnabas never said when Jesus lived or what Jesus said about allegorical interpretations of the Bible. Several important gospel teachings are missing so Barnabas is denying that they have any bearing on our salvation – he is denying the gospels whether he knows it or not. Barnabas certainly denies the Christian claim that the twelve apostles were basically reliable witnesses, he calls them the lowest ruffians.

Barnabas instructed us to love our neighbour more than ourselves (chapter 19). But Jesus said we must love our neighbour as ourselves. This teaching is a denial of Jesus' miracles for if others are to be loved more than Jesus could not have encouraged the sick to come to him for healing. Instead they should have not bothered in case they were annoying Jesus and getting in the way of somebody in a worse state getting treated by Jesus.

Barnabas tells us to work with our hands to earn redemption from our sins (chapter 19, not far from end). Earning salvation is ridiculous for we cannot deserve forgiveness and cannot do enough to be saved. We never really do what matters most.

In Barnabas 12, he quotes the Second Book of Esdras as speaking of Jesus' future death on the cross. Jesus did not use the Apocrypha which this book comes from as God's word at all so there is another proof that Barnabas did not acknowledge the gospel version of events. If he knew the gospels he would have used the sources they used to declare that Jesus had been crucified.

Barnabas said that Moses named Joshua Jesus to make him a type of Jesus. Joshua and Jesus are the same name. But Joshua who murdered and destroyed and pillaged and who failed to die tragically or rise from the dead or do miracles or give good original teaching or be sinless was the worst choice imaginable as a type for Jesus. But that does not mean Barnabas was wrong about the typology being Moses' motive. Joshua being named for Jesus implies Joshua was the most suitable picture of Jesus. Barnabas must have believed that Jesus was not much better than Joshua though Barnabas certainly would have condoned Jesus' evil. Barnabas wrote that Joshua was called Jesus because it allows all the people to perceive "how the Father reveals to us every detail that bears upon His Son". There you have it! This is a hint that the gospels are totally wrong in how they see Jesus as a person. The gospels then did not exist in the day of Barnabas or were hidden or were known to be packs of lies.

Barnabas quoted from the Old Testament but altered it to back up his claims. He was not aware that Jesus had promised that not a word of scripture would pass away. Barnabas inserted a reference to the Son of God in Exodus 17. He makes it say that the Son of God will wipe out the people of Amalek in the last days. The last days refers not to the last few days of the world but to the period in which salvation has been offered and which will end when the Son comes back. It is the last period and could be thousands of years in length. Amalek was wiped out in Old Testament times after having received crushing blows from the Israelites. So the historical Jesus is being placed in Old Testament times instead of the first century. This is a total dismissal of the gospel. Barnabas even quoted Exodus 20:8 as the Decalogue and then said that it says something in another place that is not in our Bible at all. He invented Bible verses to prove his points. To me that would suggest a date of 70 AD for the letter which was expecting Judaism and its Bible to come to an end leaving the author feeling free to lie.

When Barnabas claims that many Old Testament stories were myths or parables he would have to have the same opinion towards the New had he known of it. He would have been afraid of people taking this view and he would have clearly eliminated the New Testament from this treatment if he had believed in and/or known of it.

Barnabas felt that Jesus was an evil man who had come to be a good one. His Jesus planned to make people sin more (5,14). This contradicts the New Testament which says that Jesus was the best of men if not absolutely morally perfect.

Barnabas says that water baptism forgives sins or confers pardon which is against the gospel and calls it the fountain of life (chapter 11).

Barnabas denies that Jesus was the Son of David and says he was the Lord of David. This is similar to where in the gospels Jesus says something similar. The wording differs in such a way that it could be a coincidence. David said, "The Lord said to my Lord" in a psalm that was always taken to be messianic. In reference to it, Jesus asked if the Son of Man is David's Lord how can he be his Son? Barnabas says we must notice how David calls him Lord and not son. But he doesn't indicate anything other than that he deduced this independently of the gospels.

There is no way a book like Barnabas that says the ordinances of the Torah were never meant to be kept (pages 239-288, The Apostolic Fathers) but were codes for spiritual teachings could agree with the New Testament which says the apostles did keep the Law. The records say that the apostles kept it after the resurrection for a long time.

Lightfoot felt that Barnabas was written in Alexandria. The scholars there, Origen and Clement, studied it implying that it did originate there because books are more likely to circulate and be taken seriously where they were written. Jews who wanted to turn the Law into something allegorical taught there. Alexandria was a liberal place and the mecca of heretics and sect makers so if the four gospels were not there in Barnabas' time, Christians need to ask themselves a lot of worrisome questions. And they were not there. Barnabas couldn't get anything like them anywhere for he was able to get other obscure books for his epistle shows the influence of other early writings on it. Shouldn't that tell how obscure the gospels were, did they exist at all?

Christians respond to this article by saying that Barnabas' topic or subject was the Old Testament interpretation so he felt no need to say anything about the gospels. This ignores the fact that he contradicted the gospels. The Jesus of the gospels took the Old Testament as history and even cited the absurd story of Jonah as fact. And Barnabas says it is not history but symbol. Also, his treatise is no use without being backed up by quotes from Jesus that his method of understanding the Old Testament was legitimate. And he could give none. If he could have that would have given it authority. He would not have needed the sad gimmick of using the prestigious name of Barnabas to popularise his work.

Barnabas is evidence that the gospel data was not highly regarded by the early Church or perhaps was not even known of even half-properly.