

## INTRODUCTION

# The Legacy of the Nazarenes \*

*A textual analysis and historical appraisal  
of the Gospel of Barnabas*

by

RAIMUNDUS LULLUS

THE GOSPEL OF BARNABAS, which is here presented in the original translation by Lonsdale and Laura Ragg (1907), is one of the most enigmatic texts of Christianity. It combines Jewish and Christian elements with aspects that appear to be Islamic. Henri Corbin, in commemoration of the common ancestor of these three religions, entitled his essay on the Gospel of Barnabas “*Harmonia Abrahamica*”, thus indicating the conjunction of all three religions in this one text.

As an “abrahamitic” Gospel harmony, which uses Jesus’ traditional parables to provide a unified description of his life, the Gospel of Barnabas possesses a multi-dimensionality that may well irritate religious scholars, because it challenges the currently accepted model of Christian religious history. Unsurprisingly, with increasing public awareness, the Gospel of Barnabas has become the subject of Christian polemics, especially in the course of the past thirty years. We refer to the misleading German Wikipedia article (January 2014) as a good example, the bigoted bias of which stands out clearly when compared to the informative article of the English-language version of Wikipedia.

\* special edition from: *The Gospel of Barnabas*, Spohr Publishers, Lymperia 2015, p. 11–39.

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S U D I E S   I N   T E X T U A L   A N A L Y S I S

In the following we attempt to properly formulate the intriguing question regarding the underlying source of the Gospel of Barnabas based on text-critical comparison, and to provide the basic parameters for an answer.

*§ 1 Relevant research – Pieces of the Puzzle*

The Gospel of Barnabas available to us is the English version of an Italian manuscript, which has been kept in the National Library in Vienna for three hundred years, and judging by the paper it is written upon, can be attributed to the sixteenth century. Because of its archaic language, as well as on the strength of internal evidence, the text is thought to have originated in early fourteenth century, if not earlier. (Joosten 2010; Ragg 1907).

In the 1970s, the incomplete copy of a Spanish manuscript surfaced; its preface explains that the book had been translated from Italian by the Aragonese Muslim Mostafa de Aranda. Therein is related the story of the otherwise unknown Fra Marino, who claimed to have found the Gospel in the private library of Pope Sixtus V, and secretly copied it. The text came to light in Sydney in 1976 and was published and commented by Luis Bernabé Pons in 1998.

The first edition of the Vienna manuscript, including its English translation was published in 1907 by the philologists and Dante-scholars Lonsdale and Laura Ragg. Soonafter this work was widely circulated throughout the Islamic world where it became highly appraised as Jesus' true legacy, because the text evinced surprising harmony with the salvation history attested to by the Holy Qur'an. Christian missionaries tried to counteract this by claiming that the work was merely the forgery of a seventeenth century Jewish convert to Islam, who wanted to exact revenge for the Inquisition.

1977 Luigi Cirillo and Paul Frémaux published a facsimile edition of the manuscript with a parallel French translation, followed by Cirillo's dissertation, which to date remains the most comprehensive scientific analysis of the Gospel of Barnabas. Henri Corbin's introduction to this work entitled "*Harmonia Abrahamica*" contributed important interpretive insights, which in turn became the starting point for further investigations. A German edition followed in 1994 (Spohr Publishers), which twenty years after its publication was reissued in a new edition with this introduction.

The Gospel of Barnabas essentially contains narratives that in similar form are familiar to us from the canonical Gospels; some sections overlap with the apocryphal writings of the Old and New Testament, and in addition to this it contains extensive unique material drawn from sources that can no longer be identified today.

There are remarkable parallels to certain exotic scriptures of late Judaism that were read in Jewish-Christian circles and frequently reworked in a Christian context. Prominent examples of this in the New Testament are references to the Book of Enoch and the Ascension/Assumption of Moses in the epistle of St. Jude, the "Brother of the Lord". The narrative of Abraham's youth as found in the Gospel of Barnabas is otherwise only found in the Apocalypse of Abraham, preserved only in Old Church Slavonic (Shlomo Pinés). The story of Adam and Eve as told in the Gospel of Barnabas is paralleled in the apocryphal "Life of Adam and Eve". Other episodes from the lives of minor Old Testament prophets recounted in the Gospel of Barnabas were completely unknown thus far. They are imbued with the spirit of an ascetic Essene Judaism.

The Jesus of the Gospel of Barnabas is an Orthodox Jew who demands strict observance of the law of all his followers. Undoubtedly the historical Jesus actually taught in this way, for similar pronouncements of his are recorded even in the canonical Gospels (Matthew 6:4; 23:1 ff.).

If its critics invoked Islamic-sounding passages in the Gospel as evidence of a Muslim forgery, it is important to understand

that this impression not only does not corroborate a suspected forgery, but that it actually makes good sense, inasmuch as the old Jewish-Christianity had many things in common with Islam, such as food regulations and precepts of cleanliness (see the Schöps citation below). If criticism is levelled at the Gospel of Barnabas for calling the true Messiah “Muhammad” (“Ma-chometo” or “Maometo” in Italian) in Chapter 96, it needs to be pointed out that in Islamic scripture the Prophet, upon whom be peace, is not referred to as the *masīh*, and that the Qur’an assigns this designation only to Jesus. (cf. Sura 4/172). It is entirely possible that this whole sentence, or at any rate the phrase that speaks of Muḥammad as the “Messiah” were later insertions, unless the term here is due to a simple error of translation.

The Aramaicist Jan Joosten (2010) writes: “Basically, the Gospel of Barnabas is an orphaned text [...] We know very little about its author, the date or the circumstances of its origination.” However, Joosten here implicitly assumes as fact just what has yet to be substantiated, namely that there exists no connection between the Apostle Barnabas and the Gospel. By contrast, we consider it important to focus with due diligence on some of the important issues.

The first question would be: was there, in early Christian tradition, a gospel called the “Gospel of Barnabas”? Most definitely there was. A “Gospel according to Barnabas” is mentioned in at least two old directories, the fifth century *Decretum Gelasianum* and the seventh century *Catalogue of Sixty Canonical Books* of the Eastern Church Tradition. Moreover, it is worth noting that in both directories a “Gospel of Matthias” immediately follows the listing of our Gospel. This is so interesting because there exists evidence that the names “Barnabas” and “Matthias” might have referred to one and the same person, as will be explained in more detail below. For now, we would like to point to the *Recognitiones* of Clement of Rome<sup>1</sup>, known already to Origen, where we read:

1 Origen (~A.D.185-254) already quoted extensively from the *Recognitiones*, which therefore date back to long before the Imperial Church was established in the 4th century.

“Barnabas who is Matthias, who had become apostle in place of Judas the Traitor” (Clem. Rec. I, 60.5). This means that we must expand our search for the ancient “Gospel of Barnabas” to include a “Gospel of Matthias”, which is already mentioned as such by Clement of Alexandria around A.D. 200.

There exists a further clue. In the year A.D. 478 the grave of the Apostle Barnabas was rediscovered on Cyprus. According to the report, the “Gospel of Matthaëus” was found upon his chest, which soon after its discovery was gifted to the Byzantine emperor. It cannot have been the canonical “Gospel of Matthaëus” since this was authored decades after the death of Barnabas. Now both “Matthaëus” and “Matthias” can be traced back to the same Semitic name “Mattai”. If Matthias, who replaced Judas the Traitor and Barnabas were one and the same person, – as will be demonstrated more fully later – the question arises whether this gospel, which until the year A.D. 1204 was accessible as a relic in the Imperial Palace at Constantinople, actually was the “Gospel of Matthias”, that is the “Gospel of Barnabas”. The book has been lost since the conquest of Constantinople; today it would prove an invaluable asset.

Now, if according to the above a gospel attributed to the Apostle Barnabas actually did exist in the early Christian era, our second central issue which was already raised in 1977 by Luigi Cirillo will be: How does the “Gospel of Barnabas” text presented here relate to the missing ancient text?

Before we delve more deeply into this matter, we need to categorically refute the already mentioned allegation by Christian missionaries who claim that the Gospel of Barnabas is a Muslim forgery. First of all, it is not plausible to assume that a Jewish-born Muslim could have authored the “Gospel” as an act of revenge for the Inquisition, because at the relevant time the Jews and Muslims who remained in Spain were subjected to extremely harsh pogroms and were fighting for sheer survival. They certainly must have had other things on their mind than concocting an extensive and complex gospel, which in the case of discovery would have meant certain torture and death. Second-

ly, any assumption of forgery must be rejected in principle, as all variants of the forgery-theory assume that the book originated in Spain and was subsequently translated into Italian (Jomier, Gomez, d'Epalsa, Slomp, Wieggers, Bernabé Pons). This premise was however debunked by Jan Joosten, who likewise supports the course of events described in the preface of the Spanish manuscript itself: that the work had been translated from Italian into Spanish by an Aragonese Muslim named Mostafa de Aranda.

### § 2 *Gospel of Barnabas and Diatessaron*

Evidence of the great age of the canonical sections of the Gospel of Barnabas can be adduced on the grounds of special variants that agree with the 2nd century Gospel harmony of Tatian, the famous *Diatessaron*<sup>2</sup>.

Luigi Cirillo (see above) had already realised that the Gospel of Barnabas constitutes a Gospel harmony, i. e. a summary of witnessed evidence relating to Jesus, compiled to form a biography. Since the Gospel of Barnabas and the Diatessaron share a wealth of identical readings, this seemed to indicate that both harmonies are closely connected. However, this view can only be maintained as long as the sequence of "pericopes", that is, the sequence of text passages in the Gospel of Barnabas have not been more closely examined; for this sequence is then seen to differ dramatically from that of Tatian's famed Diatessaron. In contrast to individual variants, it is the sequence of text passag-

2 Tatian the Assyrian, compiled the four New Testament Gospels in an ingenious way as a single, continuous narrative of the life of Jesus, always careful not to omit any information. The Aramaic original of the book which in the East was regarded as the gospel per se, was destroyed by the Imperial Church in the fifth century. Translations, comments and quotes however survived and are consolidated under the heading: „diatessaronic witnesses". However, since Tatian used the Gospel of the Hebrews as a fifth source, one cannot easily distinguish whether an ancient „diatessaronic" variant is attributable to the *Diatessaron*, or should be traced back to the older "Gospel of the Hebrews".

es that is the real “fingerprint” that can prove whether one text really is derived from the Diatessaron.

Both works could spring from an even older text, such as the “Gospel of the Hebrews”, which in the case of the Diatessaron is a proven fact. Is it possible that in the canonical passages of the Gospel of Barnabas we have already found the long-lost “Gospel of the Hebrews”?

While in the fourth century Epiphanius noted that some scholars labelled the Diatessaron as “according to the Hebrews”, today researchers unanimously identify the lost “Gospel of the Hebrews” as one of the sources Tatian used in his Diatessaron. This would have been the original Aramaic Gospel according to Mattheaus, which the Apostolic Father Papias in A.D. 120 described in these words: “Matthaeus was the first to write down the words of the Lord in the Hebrew language.” Through his detailed comparison Joosten demonstrated that the canonical passages of the Barnabas Harmony share many special variants with European Gospel Harmonies, such as the Venetian, the Liège and the Pepsian Gospel Harmony. Researchers have unanimously agreed that these are all based not on Tatian’s opus, but on a lost Latin Gospel Harmony (Petersen 1994), which possibly might be the translation of the “Gospel of the Hebrews”. This would be readily compatible with the witness of Jerome (Hieronymus) around A.D. 400 who claimed to have translated the Nazarene Gospel into Latin. Inspired by Joosten’s work, the Brazilian Claudio Malzoni found nineteen agreements with diatessaronic witnesses in one section alone, the “Encounter at the Well” (Chapter 81-83).<sup>3</sup> As might be expected from

3 Assuming a uniform distribution throughout the canonical portions of the Barnabas-Harmony, this would result in about 500 „diatessaronic“ variants! This would mean that the text is less vulgarised and therefore older than the Venetian Harmony, which is assumed to date from the fourteenth century. In his study of chapters 81-83 of the Gospel of Barnabas, apart from parallels with MS Pepsy and Italian texts, Malzoni also found four similarities with the Persian Harmony and seven with the text of the Syriac Gospel! (*Revue Biblique* 113 (2006)). This speaks for a Near or Middle Eastern origin, as Luigi Cirillo had already surmised on the strength of other evidence.

Joosten's work, these are not only consistent with early Italian Gospel Harmonies, but frequently also with Oriental witnesses, such as the Perso-Aramaic Gospel Harmony, the Syriac Gospels and an Arabic *Diatessaron*<sup>4</sup>.

As an important interim result we note that "diatessaronic" variants, such as those found in the Gospel of Barnabas by Joosten and Malzoni, quite clearly express the proximity of our work to the Nazarene Gospel. In fact, there exists further evidence, hitherto overlooked in scholarly studies, to prove that at least the canonical sections of the Gospel of Barnabas are derived from the Nazarene version of the "Gospel of the Hebrews"; this we shall now attempt to delineate.

### § 3 *The Pericope of the Adulteress*

Even in standard Bible editions we find the story of the adulterous woman who is to be stoned to death, and the famous phrase: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (cf. John 8:1 ff.). However, it is here accompanied by explanatory notes, as this parable is not found in the most famous of the earlier manuscripts. The earliest physical witnesses for the "*Pericope Adulterae*", the Codices *Bezae* and *Palatinus*, date back to the fifth century A.D. and originate in the western part of the Roman Empire. To mitigate the breach caused by an artificial insertion into the Gospel of John, it had to be preceded by the verse: "Then they all went home." (John 7:53).

4 At the same time, the "100-year jubilee", which is only mentioned in this section, proves to be a late interpolation in an underlying, much earlier text. Since its first publication a hundred years ago, this Jubilee has been made to serve as prime evidence for the Gospel of Barnabas' dating from the Middle Ages, whereas at best it can serve as an indication for the translation's hailing from early Italian times. According to the Torah, which to Jesus and his early followers continued to be applicable, the Jubilee Year is celebrated every 50 years. Only the Church of Rome instituted a 100-year jubilee, which was subsequently reduced to 50-year, and later to 25-year intervals.

Eusebius provides the earliest evidence for the parable. From A.D. 300 on he was Bishop of the Palestinian city of Caesarea, where according to his testimony the now lost "Gospel of the Hebrews" was kept in the famous library. In his *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius writes that Papias in his "*Interpretation of the Words of the Lord*" (in five volumes) tells the story of a woman "who was accused before the Lord", a tale occurring also "in the Gospel of the Hebrews". That means that Eusebius has two different sources for the parable of the sinner, the commentary of Papias and the "Gospel of the Hebrews". The astonishingly large number of existing variants of this parable can be understood as a subsequent amalgamation of material contained somewhere in these two sources. This begs the question, on the basis of which features the two original versions can be distinguished, that is the Papias Pericope and the Pericope of the Hebrews, since both works have been lost for centuries and only about a dozen passages attributed to each respectively are known to us. Now the Gentile Papias composed the interpretation of the words of the Lord in Greek language for non-Jewish Christians around A.D. 120. Papias was a disciple of the Apostle John and supposedly even put into writing the Gospel of John. In the longest of the surviving fragments his propensity for fanciful flourish becomes apparent. He tends not to record events in chronological order.

The "Gospel of the Hebrews", which according to Papias was written down by the disciple Matthaeus (Matthew), in addition to material well-known from the canonical Gospels, contained references to the Jewish law which therefore were of little interest to Gentile Christians. Its text was compact and without tedious lengths. It was written in Hebraic Aramaic, the language of Jesus, and it described events in chronological order. Non-Jewish Christians mostly knew it only by name.

The scribes of most Bible manuscripts were apparently not aware of the correct position of the narrative of the adulterous woman in the biography of Jesus, otherwise it is difficult to comprehend how the passage was constantly inserted in the wrong

place. The "Gospel of the Hebrews", in which the Pericope must have been embedded within the natural flow of the narrative, can therefore not have been the source of any of these. Therefore, the scribes probably obtained their knowledge of the parable of the adulterous woman from the commentary of Papias, which in contrast to the continuous storyline of the Gospel, was not presented in chronological order.

In the *Codex Bezae* version of our parable of the sinner, we find an additional phrase that sheds some light on the target audience of this tradition; here, in John 8:9, we find the variant: "Every one of the Jews ..." Assuming that the episode takes place in the forecourt of the temple, into which non-Jews were forbidden to enter on pain of death, it becomes clear that only a text addressing itself to non-Jews, such as the Papias commentary, would make explicit mention of the Jews; however, this would not be true for the "Gospel of the Hebrews", which addresses itself only to believing Jews.

Now there exists an interesting group of manuscripts<sup>5</sup> ("Ferrar-group" MSS 13, 69, 124, 346, 543, 788, 826, 828, 983), which places the Pericope of the adulterous woman in the Gospel of Luke instead of in the Gospel of John. Assuming that it is here found in the correct chronological order, namely in connection with Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem, it says:

"By day he used to teach in the temple and go out at night and spend the night on the mountain, which is called the Mount of Olives. And all the people came to him early in the morning to the temple, that they might hear him." At this point there follows in the manuscripts of the Ferrar-group the "Story of the adulterous woman". (Luke 21:37 f.)

5 The Ferrar-group of manuscripts is characterised by certain archaic variants. Many manuscripts of the "f13" group originated in Southern Italy, where in some scarcely accessible areas a form of Christianity independent of Rome held its ground by dissembling conformity to Roman-Catholic doctrine well into the Middle Ages. In some Calabrian monasteries that remained Arian until well into the tenth century many rare writings, such as the Clementine Homilies were preserved.

Compare this to the beginning of the Pericope as we find it today in John 8:1 ff.: "Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he repaired again to the temple. All the people came to him. He sat down and taught them." Obviously, the beginning of the Pericope overlaps with Luke 21:37 f.

In the Gospel of Barnabas (Chapter 201), we find the "Pericope of the Woman taken in Adultery" in the same position as it is in the manuscripts of the Ferrar-group, namely at the end of Jesus' preaching. This means that its author knew its correct position in the life of Jesus, presumably from his knowledge of the "Gospel of the Hebrews".

A further and very interesting common feature shared by the manuscripts of the Ferrar-group and the Gospel of Barnabas with regard to the Pericope of the adulteress is the additional information that the elders could read their own sins from the ground. This feature is missing in a great number of manuscripts which have inserted the episode from Papias into the Gospel of John. We read in the Gospel of John: "But Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground." (John 8:6). Even the earliest witness of the Pericope, the *Codex Bezae*, otherwise famous for additional insertions, only reports that Jesus wrote on the ground. Apparently there is an important detail missing in the version of Papias' commentary here used, in the absence of which Jesus' action of writing on the ground remains unclear.

Only the Gospel of Barnabas (Chapter 201) tells us of the exact circumstances, thereby elucidating Jesus' action, when it says: "Then Jesus bent down and with his finger drew a mirror on the ground, in which every man beheld his own failings. As they continued to press for an answer, Jesus stood and said, pointing a finger at the mirror: 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to stone her.' And again he bent down and formed the outline of the mirror. When the men saw this, they went out one after another ..."

In the late Jerome, who often cites the "Gospel of the Hebrews" and claims also to have translated it, an echo of this theme is found, when he says: "None of the accusers of the woman caught

in adultery were without sin. Christ wrote their names upon the ground.” (*Writings against the Pelagians* [2:17])

In the oldest Armenian Bible manuscript we read: “A certain woman was caught sinning, and all testified that she deserved to die. She was brought before Jesus, in order to test him, so that they might then convict him. Jesus answered them and spoke: ‘Come ye, who are without sin, cast stones and stone her to death.’ But he, bowing his head, with his finger wrote on the ground proclaiming their sins. And they beheld their manifold sins on the stones. But they were filled with shame and departed, and no one remained but the woman alone. Quoth Jesus: ‘Go in peace, and offer the sacrifice for having sinned, as it is written in their law.’” (*Codex Edschmiadzin* [A.D. 892]) F. C. Conybeare, the discoverer of the manuscript, along with his famous friend F. C. Burkitt acknowledged the definitely archaic tone of this version. By this they probably meant the mention of the Law, the insertion of the Hebrew style element “and”, as well as the Semitic phrasing “he answered them and spoke”. More than in the standard text version, Jesus’ direct speech here conveys the impression of spoken language. The fact that the woman is only apprehended “in sin” without the term “adultery” being used, corresponds to the text of the Pericope in the Syrian *Didascalia* dating from the early third century, when we encounter the shortest version of it. No other version of the “Pericope of the Woman caught in Sin” is as suggestive of a derivation from the “Gospel of the Hebrews” as the *Codex Edschmiadzin*.

In summary, we can say: There are two things to suggest that the story of the sinning woman as narrated in the Gospel of Barnabas has its origins in the “Gospel of the Hebrews”. First of all, in the Gospel of Barnabas the “Pericope of the Sinning Woman” is in the same location as it is in New Testament manuscripts of the Ferrar-group. Its author or editor must have known the correct position of the Pericope in the life of Jesus, most likely on the basis of the “Gospel of the Hebrews”, where according to Eusebius it was once to be found. Secondly, both the manuscripts of the Ferrar-group and the Gospel of Barnabas

in the narrative of the “Women apprehended in Sin” contain the detail that the religious scholars beheld their own sins on the ground. This feature is not mentioned in any of the many manuscripts that have inserted the episode in the Gospel of John. It was presumably missing in the version of the Papias commentary used there, whereas it had been included in the “Gospel of the Hebrews”, as shown by the *Codex Edschmiadzin*. And in the depiction of the above-mentioned detail of the mirror wherein one may perceive one’s sins, the Gospel of Barnabas surpasses all other ancient sources mentioned here in its accuracy and plausibility, which speaks for the greater authenticity of the text and for its derivation from the “Gospel of the Hebrews”.

#### § 4 *Jewish-Christian Elements in the Gospel of Barnabas*

In addition to the early Jewish-Christian elements identified above in connection with the “Pericope of the Sinner” in the Gospel of Barnabas, the following also deserve mention.

1) These include singular stories about the “true Pharisees”, who lived on Mount Carmel as disciples of the prophets (cf. below).

2) The complete omission of any mention of John the Baptist is a very interesting feature and points to the earliest period of the Samaria-mission. Only in the first century A.D. there existed a rivalry between Christians and a sect of followers of John the Baptist who considered John the Baptist to be the “true prophet” instead of Jesus. In later centuries, when this John the Baptist sect no longer had any relevance, there was no more motive for omitting the mention of Jesus’ precursor.

3) In the Lord’s Prayer of the Barnabas-harmony we find the variant: “Your kingdom come within us.” This significant variation does not occur in the *Diatessaron*. It does appear, however, in the famous Judaizing *Codex Bezae Cantabrigensis*, a text that must be dated to no later than A.D. 200 on account of its unique coincidences with Irenaeus. Ironically, Jerome, who among other things

translated the "Gospel of the Nazarenes" refers to the phrase "within us" in a commentary. (Migne: *Patrologia latina*, 186, 139)

In principle, it could be argued that apart from the Nazarene variant there is also the Ebionite variant of the "Gospel of the Hebrews", and that the Gospel of Barnabas could possibly be traced back to the Ebionites rather than to the Nazarenes. However, in disagreement with Bowman and Blackhirst, we would like to make the point that the Ebionites, the second Jewish-Christian creed, must be ruled out as the originators of the archetype for the following reasons:

a) The virgin birth is mentioned in the Gospel of Barnabas, and even before his baptism Jesus performs miracles. Both these points disagree with Ebionite Christology.

b) In the Gospel of Barnabas Jesus is described as the Son of David, in contrast to the Ebionite version. David and Solomon both receive frequent and honourable mention in it.

c) In the Gospel of Barnabas another man is crucified in Jesus' stead, but he is not Simon of Cyrene, as the Basilideans believed, but Judas Iscariot.

d) The frequent and positive mention of the minor prophets is totally uncharacteristic of the Ebionites, because this creed did not accept them, as is well known.

e) The baptism of Jesus, which is so central to the Ebionites, is missing completely, so that we might even assume a deliberately anti-Ebionite editor.

The Gospel of Barnabas represents a teaching that can best be described as Essene Judaism, with the additional belief in Jesus as the new great prophet. The Christology of the Gospel of Barnabas makes it possible to specify further. For Jesus on the one hand is merely human, on the other hand Joseph is not regarded as his father and Mary conceived as a virgin, which is in sharp contrast to the Ebionites and other Jewish Christian sects. Here is a list:

1. Full compliance with the Mosaic Law.
2. Integration of the "Pericope of the sinful Woman", which was included in the "Gospel of the Hebrews" in the "correct" position in the text.

3. The strong emphasis on ritual purity and highly developed ethics.

4. The great estimation of the minor biblical prophets like Amos, Micah or Hosea, none of whom, incidentally, are mentioned in the Qur'an.

5. The utilisation of rare Old Testament Apocrypha, such as the "Apocalypse of Abraham", "Life of Adam and Eve" and their underlying oral tradition.

6. The complete omission of John the Baptist who by some sects was considered the Messiah during the early period, instead of Jesus.

7. The issue of the corruption of the Torah, which was also taken up by Jesus, according to the Clementine *Recognitiones*, as was the famous saying of the Lord, "Be ye skilful money changers," referring to the distinction between genuine and false verses.

8. The expectation of a great prophet, in whom all nations are blessed. (According to Clemens *Recognitiones* III, 61, he will come "who is sent to sow the word among the nations.")

9. The crucifixion of another in place of Jesus, here "Judas the Traitor."

10. Jesus is "merely" a human being, but he is born of a virgin.

At the end of the day, it can only be a denomination of Early Christians, who have no contention with any of these listed arguments. This is the creed of the Nazarenes, called "*Nasara*" in the Qur'an, who perpetuated the teaching and way of life of Jesus' family. This was a community which bore a striking resemblance to the Muslims of the *ablu s-sunnah wa l-jamā'ah*. Years ago, this point attracted the attention of the religious historian H. J. Schoeps, independently of any connection with the Gospel of Barnabas. He concludes his pioneering work "Jewish Christianity" with this remarkable statement: "Thus we find as a paradox of truly world-historical dimensions the fact that while Jewish Christianity has indeed become extinct in the Christian Church, it has been preserved in Islam, thereby extending some of its driving impulses into our very times."

## II HISTORICAL ISSUES

Numerous historical questions arise in the context of the preceding textual analysis. At this point only the most important ones will be considered.

### § 5 *Who are the “true Pharisees”?*

In his lectures at the Catholic University of Jerusalem in 1977, Henri Corbin held the view that the “true Pharisees” of the Gospel of Barnabas bear a surprising resemblance to the community of Early Christians that lived on Mount Carmel near Haifa and to which the Order of the Carmelites traces back its lineage. Even before this, Marc Philonenko had pointed out Essene elements in the Gospel of Barnabas.

Within sight of Caesarea (where according among others to Eusebius the most important early Christian library is once to have housed a copy of the “Gospel of the Hebrews”), rises Mount Carmel, where since the days of the Prophet Elijah ascetic religious communities and hermits have dwelt. The Old Testament refers to the community founded by Elijah and his successor, the Prophet Elisha as the “Sons of the Prophets.” Significantly, “*bar naban*” literally means “son of the prophet”! During Jesus’ lifetime, these were the famous Essenes, already linked to Jesus in the fourth century by Epiphanius of Salamis. The Essenes considered the Prophet Elijah to be their founder (“*Eliab pater essenorum*”).

According to Carmelite sources, the community of the “Sons of the Prophets” founded by Elijah was re-established by John the Baptist shortly before Jesus began to appear in public. The medieval Carmelite Order claimed to be a direct continuation of the Essenes, or the “Sons of the Prophets” (*Speculum carmel-*

*itanum*). Both the Essenes and the Carmelites regarded Mount Carmel as sacred, and both were ascetics and mystics. In fact, the continuing settlement of Mount Carmel can be documented from about A.D. 300 to A.D. 1000, (John Bowman, referring to a private communication by Rod Blackhirst). With the arrival of the Crusaders, the first reports of hermits and religious communities on Mount Carmel came to Europe. After the Crusaders' conquest of the mountains, Catholic monastic communities were settled there, which reportedly lived side by side with the original communities. Out of this was synthesised an "unorthodox" organisation (in the eyes of the Church), the older Carmelite Order whose members emigrated to Spain, England, and perhaps even to Hohenstaufen-Aragonese Sicily shortly after the final expulsion of the Crusaders in A.D. 1300. Initially, they were able to hold on to their traditions, being forced into line by the Inquisition only in A.D. 1500.

Our thesis is that the "true Pharisees" of the Gospel of Barnabas, who consider the Prophet Elijah to be their founding father (see Chapter 145 of the Gospel), are in reality the Essenes, who may accordingly be acknowledged as the "Sons of the Prophets" They accepted Jesus' "new way" brought to them by the Apostles, and continued their ascetic life on Mount Carmel as Nazarene Essenes. Their successors were still living on Carmel at the time of the Crusades and were referred to as "Carmelite". They preserved authentic Jewish-Christian traditions in oral, and probably also in written form. By the thirteenth century, they were perhaps the last surviving group of Nazarene Jewish Christians.

Therefore, our equation is: True Pharisees = original Carmelites = messianic Essenes = Nazarenes = orthodox Israelite followers of Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

When after the reconquest of Palestine by the Mamelukes in A.D. 1292, the old-Carmelites finally emigrated to Spain and

<sup>6</sup> Rod Blackhirst also regards these Early Carmelites as the most likely source for the unique traditions of the Gospel of Barnabas (private communication, 2004).

Sicily, at the time both possessions of the tolerant maritime power of Aragon, they brought their scriptures with them. At that time two great grandsons of Emperor Frederick II held office in Palermo as Archbishops.<sup>7</sup> They might have contributed to the preservation of old-Carmelite traditions through the witness of the Gospel of Barnabas up to this present day.

§ 6 *Barnabas, an Apostle from among the Twelve*

In the *Epistle to the Colossians* (Col. 4:10) John Mark is referred to as a nephew of Barnabas. This man John was the son of the Lord's sister Hannah, the daughter of Jesus' uncle Cleophas, who is mentioned in the Emmaus episode (Luke 24:18 f.) as a disciple of Jesus. Apart from Hannah and another daughter, he had four sons: Jacob, Joseph, Judas and Simon. In Mark 6:3 they are called "brethren of Jesus" which was then a common way of referring to cousins. In order for him to have been an uncle of John Mark, as written in the *Epistle to the Colossians*, Joseph Barnabas must have been a brother to his mother Hannah, consequently one of these brethren of the Lord. This view is explicitly acknowledged in Armenian traditions about the Apostles, which Louis Leloir published some years ago in *Corpus Christianorum*. The Armenian tradition goes back to Greek or Aramaic originals that are usually reproduced verbatim. Therein it is stated explicitly that Joseph Barnabas is that very brother of the Lord mentioned in Mark 6:3, whose three brothers Jacobus Alphaeus, Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Thaddaeus belonged to the circle of the Twelve, as is now generally accepted. Now we can understand why Barnabas could induce Jacobus (whom Oscar Cullmann refers to as the "first Caliph") to accept Paul into the community,

7 Relating to the amazing circumstances of his life and the political and religious environment of Emperor Frederick II, we refer to the publication *A Muslim on the Imperial Throne. The History of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. A collection of essays on a little-known piece of European history* (published by Salim E. Spohr, Lympia 2014).

for Jacobus and Barnabas were brothers. Identifying Barnabas as having been at the very least Jesus' cousin<sup>8</sup> is therefore an important first step towards reconstructing this significant personality. But there is yet more to discover.

After the departure of the traitor Judas Iscariot, it was necessary to replenish the number twelve, symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Alexandrian text of Acts 1:21 ff. (quoted from the inter-linear translation of the standard text Nestle/Aland 27) states: "21) It behoves therefore the having accompanied us men during (all) the time that came in and went out among us the Lord Jesus, 22) having begun from the baptism of John until the day in which he was taken up from us [...] 23) And they put forward two Joseph called Barsabbas who was called Justus and Matthias. 24) And having prayed they said You Lord knower of the hearts of all show (us) which you have chosen of these two one [...] 26) And they gave lots [*kleroi* in Greek] for them and fell the lot on Matthias and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

Here there is uncertainty in the text of even the best single manuscript. In his *Forschungen zur altchristlichen Literatur* (Studies in Early Christian Literature) Theodor Zahn, the great investigator into early Christianity remarked: "The extremely short tale (vv. 23-26) leaves more than one question unanswered." He continues: "But how are we to explain the circumstance that a gathering of 120 men who set out to choose one man out of a larger number, ends up by choosing two?" The words "one" and "of these two" are in collision, and this is intensified by the fact that at the end of verse 24, after the two have been named, it says: "of these two one".

Depending on which manuscript is consulted, the first name varies between Joseph, Joses or Jose, just as it does in Mark 6:3, where the Lord's brother in one instance is called Joseph, whereas in other manuscripts he is referred to as Joses. The second

<sup>8</sup> Some researchers have voiced the opinion that he was Jesus' half-brother from the first marriage of Joseph the carpenter.

name varies from Barabban to Barsabban or Barsaban. The main witness for the Western text of the Acts<sup>9</sup>, which was supplanted by the reformed Alexandrian text in the third century, is the *Codex Bezae Cantabrigensis*. In it we even read Joseph Barnaban Justus instead of Barsaban! In Acts 15:22 f. a certain Barsabas is mentioned once, but it appears his name was Judas instead of Joseph. The specific variant Barnaban of *Codex Bezae* has been mostly interpreted as an ambiguity error, although it is also present in other manuscripts of the Western type. According to the life of Joseph the carpenter, the Lord's brother Joseph, i. e. Barnabas, was also called Justus, which sheds new light on the variant "Joseph Justus Barnaban" in the *Codex Bezae*.

A few years ago the series *Corpus Christianorum*<sup>10</sup> made available an Armenian source that explicitly identifies Joseph Barnabas as the Lord's brother Joseph, the only one of the four brothers who initially did not belong to the group of the twelve disciples.

Accordingly the *Acts of Barnabas*: "Barnabas, having unrolled the Gospel which he had received from his brother Matthaeus (Matthew)." Since according to Mark 2:14, Levi Matthaeus was the son of Alphaeus, and thus one of the Lord's brothers, by this statement Barnabas is also confirmed as the Lord's brother.

Finally, the requisite condition of Acts 1:21 that it should be one who had been with them since the baptism of John, could be fulfilled only by one of Jesus' family members, for all the other disciples were chosen only after the baptism of Jesus.

Our synopsis of fragments of tradition thus reaches the following conclusion: The Lord's brother Joseph was identical with

9 The Acts exist in two receptions that differ from each other vastly, so that it has been suggested that Luke already must have written two versions. The ordinary reader of the Bible will not notice this, since only the Alexandrian reform text, compiled around A.D. 200, forms the basis of all printed versions of the Bible today. However, it is known that churches independent of Rome, such as the Encratites, Montanists, Donatists, Novatians, and also the Iro-Scottish confession preferred Bible texts of the older Western type. This text was prevalent even in Rome until around the year A.D. 250, as shown by the quotations from Cyprian and Novatian.

10 *Series apocryphorum* Nr. 3, Écrit apocryphe sur les apôtres, 1986.

Joseph Barnabas, and he in turn was a candidate for the position of the twelfth apostle left open by Iscariot.

A fragment of a Nazarene Book of Acts, which has been preserved because of its integration into the *Recognitiones* of Clement of Rome, provides one last important clue to clarifying the identity of the twelfth apostle. In this we find a depiction of how the twelve apostles conduct a public dispute with the religious scholars lasting several days on this issue: Is Jesus the Messiah, and which Messiah exactly is he? In this fragment Barnabas quite naturally takes the place of the twelfth apostle, and a note in the Latin version clarifies: "*Barnabas qui est Matthias*" ("Barnabas who is Matthias"). This phrase now sheds light on the peculiarly confusing text referring to the choice of the twelfth apostle and its strange mixture of the numerals two and one, because originally there was apparently only one candidate: Joseph Barnabas, also known as Justus and Matthias.

About the fate that Matthias supposedly met Dionysus the Areopagite in his tractate *Hierachia Ecclesiastica*, which appeals to initiates of bishop rank, voices his own opinions. After explaining that there are many points of view on this matter, he imparts his own view: "It seems to me that the scripture seeks to express a *charisma* ('gift'; Matthias means 'gift of God'!) of the primordial Godhead with the word *kleros* ('fate', 'sign'), which was to reveal the identity of the divinely chosen, designated one to that hierarchical college."

This means that no lots were drawn, but a sign was manifested signalling the heavenly confirmation of the single candidate Joseph Barnabas. A comparison of traditions about Barnabas, Justus Barsabas and Matthias provides further evidence that the designated was one single individual.

Papias, the disciple of John, in A.D. 120 reports that he heard from the daughters of Phillippus that they put Justus Barnabas to the test by making him drink poison, which he safely survived in Jesus' name. The same story can be found elsewhere in connection with Barnabas, and is finally reported by Matthias in the *Acts of Matthias*. How else to explain that both Barnabas

and Matthias allegedly were put to death by stoning in the year A.D. 63, could this have been by sheer coincidence?

Evidently "Matthias" was held in high esteem in Egypt during the first two centuries. Around A.D. 200 Clement of Alexandria quotes repeatedly from a *Gospel of Matthias*, which he obviously regarded with some sympathy. Elsewhere this Gospel may well have been known by the name of the *Gospel of Barnabas*. Their listing in pairs in the two main canonical directories, the *Decretum Gelasianum* and the *Catalogue of Sixty Canonical Books*, has already been mentioned above. Clement of Alexandria also reports that Matthias was a vegetarian, a way of life reportedly practised by the Essenes and the brethren of the Lord. The Church of Alexandria, incidentally, was founded by Mark the Evangelist, the nephew and disciple of Barnabas, so that it is unsurprising if details concerning the habits of "Joseph Barnabas known as Justus and Matthias" were handed down here, and so came to Clemens' attention who wrote them down around the year A.D. 200.

Finally, it was Matthias, who according to the title of the *Apocryphon* of Thomas of Nag Hammadi handed down to posterity the "secret words that Jesus who is alive, confided to Judas Thomas". All these conformities are easily explained by this equation: Joseph Barnabas the Righteous and the brother of the Lord = Matthias the twelfth Apostle.

Summary: Joseph Justus Barnabas the Righteous was a "brother of the Lord," that is a cousin or even half-brother of Jesus from the first marriage of Joseph the carpenter. He was also the twelfth Apostle, who is commonly known as Matthias. The fact that he is a member of the immediate family of Jesus, and a full brother of Jacob, the famous Caliph of Jerusalem, intimately connects him to a Jewish Christianity of Nazarene character, a non-Pauline Christianity that upheld Mosaic Law.

On the strength of the above reconstruction, a re-evaluation of all traditions relating to Barnabas and Matthias appears to be in order. In doing so, the traditions having to do with both these names must be combined, since the person in question is a single

individual. The existence of a Nazarene Gospel under the name of the Lord's brother, Joseph Barnabas is becoming considerably more likely in the context of what has here been delineated. After all, tradition uniformly attributes the first gospel to Barnabas' brother, Levi Matthaeus, and the second to his nephew Mark. Whether he even wrote a Gospel himself, or as the *Acts of Barnabas* report received it from his brother Matthaeus, is likely to be less important, as long as in both cases the authenticity of such a scripture remained unaffected.

All that has been said in this chapter constitutes only a small portion of the material relating to the overarching question: who was Barnabas? He is considered to have been the keenest traveller of all the Lord's brethren, and is said to have spent the last twelve years of his life on Cyprus together with Mark, after his separation from Paul. According to the *Acts of Barnabas*, he was stoned to death by the Jews and buried by Mark. However, there are also legends reporting of his ministry in the Middle East, as well as in Italy, mainly in Rome and Milan, and he is claimed to have even made his way as far as Britain.

The inclusion of the "Travels of Peter" further completes the image of Barnabas, as it shows both men to have been the closest companions.

We learn from the *Recognitiones* of Peter's successor, the first Pope Clement of Rome that Barnabas was the first eyewitness of Jesus to have reached Rome. We read in Rec I,7 after a description of Barnabas' first public speech:

"The man who thus spake to the crowd, came from the Orient; he was a Hebrew named Barnabas, claiming to belong among the disciples of that Son of God<sup>11</sup>, and to have been sent out to proclaim this message to those who wished to hear it. [...] For it was evident to me [Clement] that with this man's words were not merely rhetorical elaborations, but that he presented simply and unceremoniously what he had heard or seen of the

11 In the context of the Old Testament, it was common to refer to the prophets as the sons of God.

Son of God.”<sup>12</sup> If this report is truthful, and its authenticity has been reiterated time and again by Christian theologians since the days of the Tübingen School, Joseph Barnabas was the first Apostle to reach Rome, and was thus the true founder of the Roman Church! Peter and Paul did not arrive in Rome until many years later, and there came upon already existing communities, one Jewish and a second one consisting of Greeks and Romans.

The *Acts of Barnabas* that were allegedly written by Mark report in greater detail on the last station of the Apostle Joseph’s mission, the isle of Cyprus. As stated in the collection *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, they are credible in their geographic and ethnic details, in contrast to most other acts of the apostles. An exception is the lengthy first section, which was apparently invented to justify Paul. Therein it is incorrectly stated that Mark was a non-Jewish inhabitant of Iconium (Konya), whereas in the *New Testament* in the *Epistle to the Colossians* he is referred to as the nephew of Barnabas. According to these *Acts of Barnabas*, Barnabas and Mark preached mainly in the synagogues of the island and won over Ariston and Rhodon as their fellow campaigners who were to play a part later on. The Nazarene community founded by Barnabas continued to exist as late as A.D. 400, according to the testimony of Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis. In the ancient city of Soli near Lefke, the excavation of a church from that time can still be viewed, which was erected over the grave of the first Bishop Auxilius, who was a disciple of Mark.

### § 7 *Who really was crucified?*

For Christians versed in the Pauline doctrine, a key point of criticism of the Gospel of Barnabas concerns the report of what happened when the captors came to seize Jesus on the Mount of Olives. We read: “Then, in the face of the danger to His servant,

<sup>12</sup> Quoted from Wilhelm Schneemelcher: *Neutestamentarische Apokryphen* in the chapter about the Pseudo-Clementine Writings.

God commanded his emissaries Gabriel, Michael, Raphael and Uriel, to take Jesus away from the world. The holy angels came and carried Jesus out by the south-facing window. They carried him off and brought him into the third heaven, accompanied by angels who praise God in all eternity.” (Chapter 215) Next we are told that the “wonderful Lord” worked “wonderful things in such a manner, that Judas in language and appearance assumed such a likeness to Jesus” that the apostles believed him to be Jesus, and the henchmen apprehended Judas, “because he appeared exactly as Jesus.” (Chapter 216) In the course of events, not Jesus but Judas is to have been the one who was crucified.

While the Qur’an only states that Jesus was not killed and not crucified, but that it only appeared to them as if, (*wa lakin shub-biha lahum* [4:157]), the explosive nature of the testimony of the Apostle Barnabas lies precisely in the fact that it relates exactly what was behind this similarity and how it happened that in actual fact Judas Iscariot was crucified in Jesus’ stead.

In fact, documents from the first two centuries often speak of the suffering, but almost never of the death of Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup> As an example we could cite the first sermon of Peter in Acts 2:24. In the standard text, Peter literally speaks of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The oldest witness on this point (Irenaeus of Lyon, around A.D. 190) however reads that God delivered Jesus from “Hades” (in lieu of “death”), the “resurrection” is not at all mentioned in Irenaeus’ text at. And the famous *Codex Bezae* confirms Irenaeus verbatim. In the New Testament Epistles of the brethren of the Lord, Jacob and Judas, in the second epistle of Peter and in the Apocalypse of John the crucifixion plays no role, or at best a very minor part. For Peter, the most significant events in the life of Jesus were his baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit and the Transfiguration when he met with the Prophets Moses and Elijah on Mount Tabor.

13 Cf. Bart D. Ehrman: *The orthodox corruption of scripture* (Oxford 1996). On page 154 he mentions that in the text of the New Testament in some places the word “suffering” (of Christ), has been replaced by “dying”!

The Epistle of the Hebrews, which was probably arranged by Barnabas<sup>14</sup>, as Tertullian (around A.D. 200) mentions, says about Jesus (Chapter 5:7): "When he was alive on earth, he addressed amidst loud crying and weeping prayers and supplications to the One who alone could save him from death, and he was answered and delivered from his fears." Does this not indicate that God delivered Jesus from the crucifixion, which is the position taken by the Gospel of Barnabas and the Holy Qur'an? The "Didache [Teaching] of the Twelve Apostles", which according to the Lebanese *Kitāb al-Hudā* was authored by Barnabas and was considered canonical until well into the fourth century, speaks neither of the death nor of the resurrection of Jesus. Even the Lord's Supper bears no relationship to suffering, death and resurrection. (Text: Berger/Nord: *Das neue Testament*, 1999) The Didache begins with the "teaching of the two ways" which occurs in similar form in the Epistle of Barnabas. Stylistic comparisons of that epistle with the *Didache* and the *Epistle to the Hebrews* could possibly prove that both originated from the same pen.

Apart from the obvious Pauline interpolations, the earliest documents provide no evidence that in the first century Christians other than adherents to Paulinism believed that Jesus had saved the world by his death on the cross.

His alleged crucifixion is what prevents the Jews from accepting Jesus as a prophet or Messiah to this very day. For in the Torah it is stated unequivocally in Deuteronomy 21:23: "He who dies at the stake, is cursed by God", which is why this sentence was imposed almost exclusively for blasphemy. Therefore

14 The canonical directory of the *Codex Claromontanus* contains an *Epistle of Barnabas* instead of an *Epistle to the Hebrews*. However, the excellent Greek style and some parallels to the First Epistle of Clement point to Clement of Rome as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. According to the *Recognitiones* he was a student of Joseph Barnabas. It would therefore come as no surprise if the content matter were by Barnabas, and the polished Greek supplied by Clement. Already in the third century both were mentioned as potential authors. The other two considered for authorship at the time, namely Paul and Luke, are most unlikely candidates.

to this day it remains incomprehensible to Jews that God should allow the crucifixion of His prophet, because He does not act in contradiction to His own holy book. Jewish Christians, who continued to uphold the validity of the Torah, could not possibly believe that Jesus died on the cross.

From this we see that in the days of old it was not generally accepted belief that Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified. In fact, among the Jewish-Christian groups the Kerinthians and Ebionites believed that it was Simon of Cyrene, who had helped to carry the cross to Calvary (Luke 23:26) who was crucified in Jesus' stead. Other Jewish-Christians believed that Jesus had indeed suffered on the cross, but had not died on it. The Gentile-Christian Encratites did not believe in Jesus' crucifixion, as is made clear from their *Acts of John* where Jesus says: "And I am also not the one on the cross; I whom you cannot now see, but whose voice you hear." He continued: "I have suffered none of what they will say about me." Might this testimony of Jesus be the reason that there are no crucifixion reports in the *Diatessaron* of Tatian, the founder of the Encratites?

Ultimately, there is even more evidence that the traitor Judas suffered on the cross in Jesus' stead. In the fourth section of his Qur'an commentary the Persian scholar al-Ṭabarī (tenth century A.D.) reports that some Christians claim that it was Judas Iscariot who was crucified in the place of Jesus. He claims to have gleaned this information from Christians who converted to Islam. In addition to this remarkable report, here is a reference to a text that confirms al-Ṭabarī as well as the Gospel of Barnabas:

The *Persian Diatessaron*, which on a formal level has the most in common with the Gospel of Barnabas, describes the arrest of Jesus as follows: "Judas came and approached Jesus, kissed him and said: 'Hail to thee, O my Lord.' Jesus spoke, 'May that for which you have come be upon you.'" (*Persian Harmony* IV, 37). The Jesuit G. Messina who discovered the Persian text in the Bibliotheca Vaticana and translated it into Italian observes: "Strange, this modification of the text, which seems to be equivalent to a curse: 'May that fall upon you for which you came.'"

If these words of Jesus Christ, the “Word of God”, truly came to pass, it necessarily follows that it was Judas Iscariot who died on the cross.

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