

## The Gospel of Barnabas

Have you ever heard of the Gospel of Barnabas? Some people say it is the only true Gospel, the one that has been hidden by the Christians. These people claim that the Gospels contained in the Bible are corrupted versions of what God gave to Jesus. Unlike the four books that Christians recognize, the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, this book, which claims to have been written by Barnabas, explicitly cites the name of Muhammad. In speaking of the first man, it says in chapter 39, “Adam, having sprung up upon his feet, saw in the air a writing that shone like the sun, which said: ‘There is only one God, and Mohammed is the messenger of God.’” According to Barnabas, Jesus reproached the apostle Peter for having attributed to him the title of Son of God, and he wept because of this expression. He said in chapter 112:

“Know, O Barnabas, that for this I must have great persecution, and shall be sold by one of my disciples for thirty pieces of money. Whereupon I am sure that he who shall sell me shall be slain in my name, for that God shall take me up from the earth, and shall change the appearance of the traitor so that every one shall believe him to be me; nevertheless, when he dieth an evil death, I shall abide in that dishonour for a long time in the world. But when Mohammed shall come, the sacred messenger of God, that infamy shall be taken away.”

These are ideas that are in complete harmony with the beliefs of a good many Muslims. Before accepting this document as authentic, however, it would be best to examine it more closely.

### IT CONTRADICTS THE QUR’AN AND THE BIBLE

Those who espouse the idea that the document known as the Gospel of Barnabas is the true Gospel have probably never read it. Just like those who accept, without verification, the idea that the Bible has been corrupted, these individuals have surely made the mistake of accepting, without verification, the idea that the Gospel of Barnabas is a true account of the life and the words of Jesus. Yes, this book is in conflict with the Bible, but it is in conflict with the Qur’an, also.

For example, it says in chapter 3, “While Joseph abode there the days were fulfilled for Mary to bring forth. The virgin was surrounded by a light exceeding bright, and brought forth her son without pain.” The Qur’an, however, clearly says about Mary in Surah 19:23 – *Maryam*, “The pains of labour drove her to the trunk of a date-palm. She said, ‘Oh, if only I had died before this and passed into oblivion!’”

Another conflict concerns the title of Messiah. According to the Gospel of Barnabas, chapter 42, “Jesus confessed, and said the truth: ‘I am not the Messiah.’” He supposedly said, to the contrary, that it was Muhammad who was the Messiah. We read in chapter 43, “If the messenger of God whom ye call Messiah were son of David, how should David call him lord? Believe me, for verily I say to you, that the promise was made in Ishmael, not in Isaac.” The Qur’an says just the opposite, systematically attributing to Jesus alone the title of Messiah, *al-Masih*. For example, in Surah 4:171 – *An-Nisa*, it speaks of “The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary.” Neither the Qur’an nor the Hadiths ever call Muhammad the Messiah.

The Qur’an, in Surah 2:29 – *Al-Baqarah*, says that Allah “turned towards heaven and fashioned it into the seven heavens. He has knowledge of all things.” According to the Gospel of Barnabas, there are nine heavens: “Jesus answered: ‘Paradise is so great that no man can measure it. Truly I say to you that the heavens are nine... But stop you at the measuring of the first heaven, which is by so much greater than the whole earth as the whole earth is greater than a grain of sand. So also the second heaven is greater than the first, and the third than the second, and so on, up to the last heaven’ (Chapter 178).

The Qur’an authorizes polygamy; the Gospel of Barnabas, in chapter 115, forbids it.

Every Christian who reads the Gospel of Barnabas immediately sees that it contradicts the Bible on numerous points. If the Bible is the Word of God, the Gospel of Barnabas cannot be. The Muslim, for his part, should understand that the so-called Gospel of Barnabas is not in harmony with the Qur’an. If it contradicts both the Bible and the Qur’an, it is clearly

not inspired by God. Muhammad said that God gave the Injeel to Jesus. The book we are talking about here could not possibly be the Injeel of which Muhammad spoke.

### **IT COMES FROM NEITHER THE FIRST CENTURY NOR FROM PALESTINE**

The real Barnabas was a first century Jew. The disciples of Jesus followed their teacher throughout the Palestinian provinces such as Galilee and Judea. It is obvious that the author of the Gospel of Barnabas did not know the geography of Palestine. In chapter 20 he says that Jesus got in a boat and sailed to Nazareth. Having arrived in Nazareth, the seamen spread through the city, telling about a miracle that Jesus had done. Nazareth, however, is not located near the Sea of Galilee. It is in the hills a good distance from the sea. According to Barnabas, Jesus left Nazareth and “went up” to Capernaum. There again he is mistaken, for Capernaum actually is located on the Galilee seashore and one cannot “go up” to get there, certainly not from Nazareth.

In chapter 3 “Barnabas” says that Jesus was born while Pontius Pilate was governor. In fact, Herod the Great was the king over all of Palestine at the time of Christ’s birth. Pontius Pilate was not sent to govern Judea until 26 A.D.

The author of Barnabas does not know that “Christ” and “Messiah” mean the same thing, for he always speaks of “Jesus Christ” but has Jesus say: “I am not the Messiah.” In reality, Christ comes from the Greek word, *christos*, and Messiah comes from the Hebrew, *mashiach*. Both words mean exactly the same thing: the one who is anointed.

The Gospel of Barnabas is filled with what are called anachronisms. An anachronism is when a speaker or writer places a fact, a custom, a person, etc. in a time other than the one to which it really belongs. It is usually done by mistake or out of ignorance. Here are a few examples.

In chapter 92 it is said that “at this time we with Jesus, by the word of the holy angel, were gone to Mount Sinai. And there Jesus with his disciples kept the Forty day (Lent).” The problem is that at that time, Judaism had no forty-day period set aside for fasting or any other purpose; neither the Law nor the

Jewish traditions speak of such an observance. The practice of abstinence for a period of forty days is unknown prior to the 4th century. It is a Catholic tradition that did not exist in the time of Jesus and his disciples.

Every time the Gospel of Barnabas quotes the Jewish scriptures, it uses the Latin translation of the Bible, called the Vulgate. This translation did not even exist until several centuries after the death of the real Barnabas.

In chapter 152 we find this interesting sentence: “Whereupon straightway the soldiers were rolled out of the Temple as one rolls casks of wood when they are washed to refill them with wine; insomuch that now their head and now their feet struck the ground, and that without any one touching them.” The author, who wants to pass for a first-century Jew, does not realize that wine was not kept in wooden casks, or barrels, in the first century, especially not in Palestine, where wine was kept in wineskins, sewn from the skin of animals, or else in clay jars (amphorae). Casks for wine were practically unknown in the Roman Empire before 300 A.D.

Many other examples of this kind could be given, but it is clear that the book contains numerous errors, and the kind of error one makes when speaking of a time or a country that one does not know personally. The author of this book was no associate of Jesus, nor even of one of the early disciples of Jesus. He lived centuries later and in another country.

Long passages of the Gospel of Barnabas even provide proof of plagiarism. For example, in chapter 135 we read, “Know ye, therefore, that hell is one, yet hath seven centres one below another. Hence, even as sin is of seven kinds, for as seven gates of hell hath Satan generated it.” These words and many others are taken directly from a literary work called *The Divine Comedy*, composed by the Italian writer, Dante Alighieri, in 1314 A.D.

### **THE PROBLEM OF THE MANUSCRIPTS**

Finally, let us deal with manuscripts. There are thousands of manuscripts of the Bible, handwritten copies, many of which date back to the second and third centuries A.D. The New Testament was not

written very long after the events it describes. The various Gospels contained in the New Testament, those of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are frequently mentioned by Christian authors in the oldest historical documents. It is simply not possible that these books could be late inventions, especially not after the time of Muhammad.

On the other hand, we do not find, prior to 1634, any mention of the Gospel of Barnabas that could correspond to the book we are discussing. The reference in 1634 comes from a Tunisian author named Ibrahim al-Taybili. As for manuscripts, only two manuscripts of the Gospel of Barnabas are known, one in Italian and the other in Spanish; both date from the 16th century. The Spanish manuscript has been lost, but a copy of it had been made in the 18th century before its disappearance. No other manuscript of the book has ever been discovered. No proof exists to suggest that this book may have existed during the first 1300 years after the life of Jesus. Those who are best informed suggest that the Gospel of Barnabas was written by an unknown author sometime between the 14th and the 16th centuries after Christ, and that this author was not Jewish, as the real Barnabas was.

[A few years ago, rumors were spreading on the Internet: "An ancient manuscript... found with bandits... by the Turkish police... secrets... hidden for 1500 years... the Vatican is afraid..." This manuscript was reputed to be written in Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke. Couldn't this be the lost Gospel, the one by Barnabas? As a matter of fact, no. The manuscript is not that old. On the one hand, it is not in Palestinian Aramaic, the language spoken in the time of Jesus, but rather in Syriac, a version of Aramaic spoken near Turkey. The way the words are written is not the classical script but a more modern script. Finally, the manuscript itself says that it was produced in Nineveh in 1500 A.D. So it was produced in the year 1500 of our era, and not 1500 years ago, as media reports mistakenly claimed. As for its contents: a man named Tatian produced in the second century a synthesis of the four Biblical Gospels to make of them a single continuous account, called the Diatessaron. The manuscript being discussed on the Internet is apparently a Syriac translation of the Diatessaron which was made from

the Greek version. This translation, of which other manuscripts exist, is known by the name "Peschitta".]

### CONCLUSION

The so-called Gospel of Barnabas is obviously a counterfeit, a lie; but that should not surprise us: we have already seen that it contradicts both the Bible and the Qur'an. It is not the Word of God. It is not an eye-witness account of the life of Jesus. It cannot cast doubt on the authenticity of the New Testament. On the contrary, a comparison of the true Gospel and this false one only strengthens our confidence in the trustworthiness of the Gospel that we possess. So get yourself a copy of the Bible, and read it!