

**THE EPISTLE OF BARNABAS
FROM THE SINAITIC
MANUSCRIPT OF THE BIBLE**

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The Epistle of Barnabas from the Sinaitic Manuscript of the Bible by Samuel Sharpe

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SAMUEL SHARPE

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*Bible. N. T. Apocryphal books Epistle of Barnabas.
Greek. 1880*

ΒΑΡΝΑΒΑ ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ.

THE EPISTLE OF BARNABAS

FROM THE

SINAITIC MANUSCRIPT OF THE BIBLE,

WITH A TRANSLATION,

BY

SAMUEL SHARPE.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE:

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PREFACE.

THE Epistle of Barnabas seems to claim notice in any Life of the Apostle Paul : first, because the two apostles had at one time lived in close friendship, and it in part explains why at a later time Paul's feelings towards Barnabas were changed ; and secondly, because it offers the earliest example of the Gnosticism which was creeping into the Christian Churches, very much to the trouble of Paul. But when I wished to mention this Epistle in my work on "The Journeys and Epistles of the Apostle Paul," I was met with the difficulty of not knowing of any English translation that I thought satisfactory. Hence this publication.

S. S.

32 Highbury Place,
11th September, 1880.

INTRODUCTION.

JOHNS, who by the Apostles was surnamed Barnabas, was an Israelite of the island of Cyprus, and of the tribe of Levi. He is first mentioned in Acts iv. 36, as selling his land in Cyprus and laying the money at the Apostles' feet as a contribution to the young Church. We next hear of him as bringing Saul, who had lately been persecuting the Church, to the Apostles who distrusted him, and assuring them that Saul's conversion was real (Acts ix. 27). He next goes down from Jerusalem to Antioch to preach to the Church in that Greek city (Acts xi. 22). He then goes to Tarsus in search of Saul, and brings him to Antioch to join in preaching there (Acts xi. 25). When the Church of Antioch sends money to the relief of the poor of Jerusalem, they send it by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts xi. 30). He then accompanies Saul on his first missionary journey (Acts xiii. 3). Up to this time, of the two friends Barnabas had been the chief; he had been the longest time a Christian, and he was probably the older man. From this only can we form an opinion of his age.

If we suppose that Saul, now called Paul, was about 22 years old when he is called a young man, at the time of Stephen's martyrdom, in A.D. 40, he may have been born in A.D. 18; and we may by conjecture suppose that Barnabas was born as early as A.D. 15 or earlier, and therefore was at least 55 years old when Jerusalem was destroyed and our Epistle probably written. When Paul and Barnabas travel together they are both called Apostles in Acts xiv. 14.

The last we know of Barnabas in the New Testament is in the Epistle to the Colossians, when Paul, having occasion to mention Mark, describes him as the cousin or nephew of Barnabas, adding "about whom ye have received commands; if he come to you, receive him." Thus Paul had sent to the Colossians some private warning against Barnabas's teaching, which he had latterly found reasons for disliking. From his Greek education in Cyprus we might suppose that Barnabas had adopted something of the Alexandrian philosophy, which no doubt was the character of Apollos's teaching. He probably was a ready speaker, as we judge from his new name—Barnabas, or *Son of exhortation*. As a Levite he is likely to have had a full acquaintance with the Scriptures, but, from the place of his birth, perhaps in Greek rather than in Hebrew. This is nearly all that we can know of him before reading the Epistle which bears his name.

From the Epistle we shall learn that when Nero's persecution of the Christians broke out, in A.D. 64, Barnabas was able to save his life by withdrawing to some place of safety,

which he does not think proper to name; and that from thence, in the beginning of Vespasian's reign, he was able to write to the flock among whom he had been ministering before the persecution.

This Epistle scholars have lately very much put aside as not being the work of Paul's companion, but, as I consider, without good reason. The evidence for and against cannot be better stated than in the words of Drs. Roberts and Donaldson in the preface to their translation:—

“External and internal evidence here come into direct collision. The ancient writers who refer to this Epistle unanimously attribute it to Barnabas the Levite of Cyprus, who held such an honourable place in the infant church. Clement of Alexandria does so again and again (*Strom.* ii. 6, ii. 7, etc.). Origen describes it as ‘a catholic epistle’ (*Cont. Cels.* i. 63), and seems to rank it among the Sacred Scriptures (*Comm. in Rom.* i. 24). Other statements have been quoted from the fathers, to show that they held this to be an authentic production of the apostolic Barnabas; and certainly no other name is ever hinted at in Christian antiquity as that of the writer. But notwithstanding this, the internal evidence is now generally regarded as conclusive against this opinion. On perusing the Epistle the reader will be in circumstances to judge of this matter for himself. He will be led to consider whether the spirit and tone of the writing, as so decidedly opposed to all respect for Judaism—the numerous inconsistencies which it contains with regard to Mosaic enactments and observances—the absurd and trifling inter-

pretations of Scripture which it suggests—and the many silly vaunts of superior knowledge in which its writer indulges—can possibly comport with its ascription to the fellow-labourer of St. Paul.”

Thus these translators find nothing in the Epistle which leads them to think it not genuine, except, 1st, its want of respect for Judaism, which, however, is not remarkable in the friend of Paul; 2nd, its inaccuracy as to the Mosaic law, which is certainly a proof of an imperfect education but no proof that it was not written by Barnabas; 3rd, its trifling interpretations of Scripture, in which it is by no means singular among the writings of the time, as in those of the learned Philo; and, 4th, its silly vaunts of superior knowledge, which is exactly the failing which we should expect to find in any Greek Jew who had fallen into the conceited Gnosticism of that age. Upon the whole there is nothing whatever to be said against the genuineness of this Epistle, except that it falls far short of the high excellence that we should wish to find in any writing which puts forth a claim from the name of its author to be admitted into the canon of the New Testament.

One reason given for doubting the authenticity of the Epistle is that in ch. v. he says that Jesus, when choosing his Apostles who were to preach the Good Tidings, chose “those who were *ανομωτεροι*, *impious* [or, rather, *neglectors of the Law*, in matters important], above all sin,” in order to show that he came “to call not the righteous but sinners.” This has been understood to mean that he calls the Apostles

impious ; and therefore that he could not have been Barnabas. If, however, this argument were good, the words would prove that the writer could not have been a Christian ; and hence the argument is very clearly of no weight. Moreover the words do not necessarily bear that meaning ; and the writer's aim throughout the Epistle is so obviously to show his cleverness in handling Scripture, that we need not so understand them.

When the Apostles at the Council (Acts xv.) consented to waive much of the Mosaic Law in favour of Gentile converts, they certainly were neglectors of the Law ; and Barnabas's words do not necessarily mean more, although by the fancifully applying to the call of the twelve Apostles the text, "he came to call not the righteous but sinners," the words would be so understood in any less fanciful writer.

In considering the authorship of the Epistle we must have regard to Paul's words in Coloss. iv. 10. There he says very clearly that he had written a private letter, or had sent a message of commands, to the Colossians about Barnabas. This cannot have been otherwise than something that he would not mention in the public Epistle, some warning against listening to Barnabas's teaching. We thus have reasonable proof that Paul at that time did not like Barnabas's opinions ; and as Cyprus, of which island Barnabas was a native, was much under the influence of Alexandria, we might guess, without the evidence of this Epistle, that it was Barnabas's leaning towards Gnosticism that displeased Paul.

The Epistle is important in the history of Paul. It shows