

JAMES N. RHODES

The Epistle of Barnabas
and the Deuteronomomic
Tradition

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
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Mohr Siebeck

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James N. Rhodes

The Epistle of Barnabas and the Deuteronomic Tradition

Polemics, Paraenesis, and the Legacy
of the Golden-Calf Incident

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

The present volume is a slightly revised version of my doctoral dissertation completed at the Catholic University of America (Washington, D.C.) and defended in September 2003. My fascination with the Apostolic Fathers in general, and the *Epistle of Barnabas* in particular, began in undergraduate school when I first sat down with a copy of Lightfoot and Harmer's well known one-volume edition. Some years later, during my first year as a graduate student, I worked my way through the Greek text of the Apostolic Fathers for the first time. Michael Holmes's revision of Lightfoot-Harmer had recently appeared, and I discovered some minor textual problems in the first edition, which I called to Prof. Holmes's attention. He has kindly encouraged my own work ever since. For my M.A. thesis I did a detailed study of allegorical interpretations of the biblical dietary laws in the *Letter of Aristeas*, the works of Philo, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and selected patristic writers. My foray into the considerable secondary literature on *Barnabas* subsequently gave rise to the present study.

The *Epistle of Barnabas* is infamous for making a singularly provocative claim: because of their worship of the golden calf, the people of Israel lost their covenant forever at Sinai. Taken at face value, such a claim implies that Israel never became God's covenant people. Most modern scholars therefore assert that the author has no concept of "salvation history." However, closer inspection reveals numerous reasons for questioning such an inference. The most important of these are the author's citation of prophetic authorities from the later history of Israel, his conviction that Israel was offered the gospel message, and the repeated declaration that the rejection of Jesus was what brought the nation's sins to completion. The reader is thus presented with not one but two catastrophic thresholds in the history of Israel.

The central claim of this monograph is that the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas* does indeed have a notion of salvation history. The emphasis he places upon the debacle at Sinai is secondary to his interest in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the significance of the golden-calf incident is paradigmatic, not temporal. Barnabas sees Israel's national calamity as a result of its failure to live up to God's covenant (in general) and its rejection of Jesus (in particular). What emerges is a view of salvation history conditioned by three events: the golden-calf incident (Israel's paradigmatic failure), the rejection of Jesus (Israel's culminating failure), and the destruction of Jerusalem (Israel's final abandonment by God).

The monograph begins by exposing the salvation-historical problem presented by the epistle. After an examination of alternative solutions, I suggest reasons why the author's assertion about the golden-calf incident is best understood as intentionally hyperbolic. This is followed by a detailed examination of Barnabas's interest in the fate of the temple, which explores many subtle hints linking Israel's national disaster to its rejection of Jesus. I argue that the epistle was probably composed in light of Hadrian's plan to build a temple to Jupiter where Yhwh's temple once stood, and that Barnabas saw this event as the death-blow to Jewish hopes for the temple's restoration.

The central part of the monograph places Barnabas's critique of Israel's failings within the broader context of the Deuteronomistic tradition as it survives in early Jewish and early Christian literature. Notwithstanding his Christian presuppositions, Barnabas is shown to be a nomistic thinker heavily influenced by the rhetoric of Deuteronomy. His interest in the status of Israel's covenant — is it still valid? — finds its best explanation in the context of contemporary writings wrestling with this same question. The monograph concludes by showing that Barnabas has a notion of salvation history that emphasizes both continuity (one covenant) and discontinuity (supersession). The litany of Israel's failings serves as a foil against which the author exhorts his own audience to covenant fidelity and eschatological perseverance.

This work would not have been possible without the encouragement and assistance of many individuals. First and foremost I wish to thank my director, Prof. Francis J. Moloney, who guided my work from start to finish and was unfailingly generous with his time, wisdom, and perceptive criticism. I am similarly indebted to my readers, Prof. Francis T. Gignac and Prof. Christopher T. Begg, who offered many helpful suggestions. Prof. Michael Holmes of Bethel College read parts of the manuscript and added his encouragement to my text-critical reevaluation of *Barn.* 4:6.

I offer special thanks to Prof. Jörg Frey, who accepted this work for publication in the WUNT II monograph series. I also extend my appreciation to Prof. James Carleton Paget and Prof. Reidar Hvalvik, whose works on the *Epistle of Barnabas* appeared earlier in this series. Since I have not hesitated to chart a somewhat different course for the interpretation of the epistle, I can only hope that this volume will stimulate a scholarly dialogue that will further illuminate the significance of this early Christian text.

Above all I am indebted to my wife, Michele, who supported me throughout my graduate studies, and to our daughter, Mireille, who has brought a joy into our lives with which the rewards of academic life can never compete.

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Abbreviations

The abbreviations used in this monograph correspond to those recommended in the style sheet of *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* [CBQ 60 (1998) 829–56]. Additional abbreviations used appear below:

<i>ASE</i>	<i>Annali di storia dell'esegesi</i>
<i>GNP</i>	G. N. Stanton, <i>A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew</i> (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 1992).
<i>KAV</i>	Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern
<i>NThT</i>	<i>Nieuw theologisch tijdschrift</i>
<i>SAFB</i>	L. W. Barnard, <i>Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and their Background</i> (New York: Schocken, 1966).
<i>SPhilo</i>	<i>Studia philonica</i>
<i>ThH</i>	Théologie Historique
<i>ThT</i>	<i>Theologisch tijdschrift</i>

Note on Editions and Translations

The base text adopted for this study is the bilingual edition of J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, as revised and updated by M. W. Holmes (*The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of Their Writings* [2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992; updated 1999]). As a rule, I have followed the English translation of Holmes. On a few occasions I have made minor modifications to accommodate text-critical variants (e.g., in 4:6) or in the interest of consistency (e.g., the uniform translation of δικαιώματα as “righteous decrees”). Such modifications are noted where they occur.

On textual matters, I have also regularly consulted other editions, especially the commentaries of Klaus Wengst (*Didache (Apostellehre). Barnabasbrief. Zweiter Klemensbrief. Schrift an Diognet* [Schriften des Urchristentums 2; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984]) and Pierre Prigent and Robert Kraft (*Épître de Barnabé* [SC 172; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971]). I have also availed myself of the older but still valuable edition of Oscar Gebhardt and Adolf Harnack (*Barnabae Epistula, graece et latine* [Patrum Apostolicorum Opera; 2d ed.; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1878]).

Note on Text-Critical Abbreviations

The primary textual witnesses for the *Epistle of Barnabas* are the following:

(1) Codex Sinaiticus, the fourth-century biblical manuscript discovered by Tischendorf, designated \aleph in editions of the Greek New Testament but frequently as S in critical works on the *Epistle of Barnabas*.

(2) Codex Hierosolymitanus 54 (also known as Constantinopolitanus), the eleventh-century manuscript discovered by Philotheos Bryennios in 1873 and variously designated C or H in critical works on the *Epistle of Barnabas*. This manuscript carries an internal date of 1056.

(3) A family (G) of ten or eleven Greek manuscripts (one is apparently no longer extant) that preserves *Barn.* 5:7b–21:9 without interval following a version of Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians* truncated at 9:2. These witnesses are thus a bizarre hybrid of two defective texts. Some editors (Kraft, Prostmeier, q.v.) divide this family further into subsets: G1, G2, G3. One manuscript, the eleventh-century Codex Vaticanus 859 (V), is regarded by many scholars as the archetype of the others in the family.

(4) Papyrus PSI 757 (P), a small papyrus fragment datable to the third or fourth century, containing *Barn.* 9:1–6.

(5) The Latin version preserved in Codex Corbeiensis Q.v.I. 38/39 (Leningrad) and originally published by Hugo Menardus in 1645. Cf. J. M. Heer, *Die Versio Latina des Barnabasbriefes und ihr Verhältnis zur altlateinischen Bibel* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herdersche Verlagshandlung, 1908).

(6) Clement of Alexandria, who knew and used the *Epistle of Barnabas*, though without always citing it explicitly.

Commentaries and editions of the *Epistle of Barnabas* vary in their presentation of the textual evidence. In addition to the alternative designations employed both for Sinaiticus and for the Bryennios manuscript, some editors cite G as a family (in varying degrees of detail) while others cite only V (Windisch, Wengst). In an effort to make text-critical discussions user-friendly and to facilitate comparison with various critical editions, Sinaiticus will be cited as S/ \aleph and the Bryennios manuscript as C/H. The collective witness of the G family of manuscripts will be cited as V/G unless it becomes necessary to discriminate between individual witnesses. For further details on the history and value of the extant manuscripts, see Prigent and Kraft, *Barnabé*, 49–70 and Ferdinand R. Prostmeier, *Der Barnabasbrief* (KAV 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1999) 11–74.

Chapter One

What Really Happened at Sinai?

The Nature of the Problem

In discussions of early Jewish-Christian relations and particularly in attempts to chronicle the so-called “parting of the ways” between the two faiths, it has long been a commonplace to note the importance of the golden-calf incident (Exodus 32) in Christian *Adversus Judaeos* literature.¹ The author of the so-called *Epistle of Barnabas*, an anonymous document of the late first or early second century,² is the first Christian writer to make extensive use of this biblical episode and, in the eyes of many scholars, the most radical in the conclusions he is prepared to draw from Israel’s apostasy at Sinai. For if Justin and later patristic writers are willing to assert that Israel’s ritual law was subsequently imposed as a punishment for the golden-calf incident,³ Barnabas is prepared to assert that God’s covenant with Israel itself came forever to an end, shattered with the tables of the decalogue thrust from Moses’ hands. Or so it would seem.

¹ For general treatments of the theme, see L. Smolar and M. Aberbach, “The Golden-Calf Episode in Postbiblical Literature,” *HUCA* 39 (1968) 91–116; P. C. Bori, *The Golden Calf and the Origins of the Anti-Jewish Controversy* (University of South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 16; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

² The *terminus a quo* for the document is 70 C.E. on the grounds of its explicit reference to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (16:5). The first unambiguous attestation of the document is found in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, thus making the *terminus ante quem* approximately 190 C.E. However, the absence of any explicit reference to the failure of the Bar Kochba revolt (when it would clearly serve the author’s argument to exploit this fact) leads the majority of scholars to place the writing between the first and second Jewish revolts. Attempts to date the writing more precisely are notoriously problematic. Many have argued for a date in Hadrian’s reign, shortly before the second Jewish revolt, although the reign of Nerva has recently found renewed advocacy. For surveys of the question, see esp. R. Hvalvik, *The Struggle for Scripture and Covenant: The Purpose of the Epistle of Barnabas and Jewish-Christian Competition in the Second Century* (WUNT 2/82; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1996) 17–34, and J. N. B. Carleton Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas: Outlook and Background* (WUNT 2/64; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1994) 9–30. Further discussion of the date of *Barnabas* and its relevance to the present investigation is postponed until Chapter Two, where the temple question will be examined in detail.

³ *Dial.* 18–23; cf. Irenaeus *Haer.* 4.15.

On two occasions Barnabas clearly invokes the apostasy at Sinai in such a way as to suggest that Israel never quite took possession of the covenant God had intended for the people (4:6b–8; 14:1–4a [see Table 1–1 on the following page]). Both passages offer a highly compressed account of the event, concentrating on the following details: (1) Moses' fasting on the mountain forty days and nights (Exod 24:18; cf. Deut 9:9); (2) Moses' reception of the tablets, inscribed by the finger of God (Exod 31:18; cf. Deut 9:10–11); (3) announcement of the people's apostasy and the command for Moses to descend the mountain (Exod 32:7–8; cf. Deut 9:12); and (4) Moses' descent and his destruction of the tablets (Exod 32:19; cf. Deut 9:17). Each passage is stamped with the author's interpretation of the event, not once but twice. In 4:6–8 this is expressed as complete loss of the covenant (ἐκεῖνοι . . . εἰς τέλος ἀπώλεσαν αὐτήν [v. 6]. . . . ἀπώλεσαν αὐτήν [v. 8]); in 14:1–4 this is expressed as failure to be found worthy to receive it (οὐκ ἐγένοντο ἄξιοι λαβεῖν [v. 1]. . . . οὐκ ἐγένοντο ἄξιοι [v. 4]).

Both passages rely on a symbolic association between the tables of the covenant and the covenant itself. In 14:1–4 the destruction of the tables of the covenant is the implicit proof that Israel was not worthy to receive the covenant; in 4:6–8 the author states unambiguously that when Moses thrust the tablets from his hands, the covenant itself was shattered. It was not as if the covenant had not been offered, for both passages affirm that Moses received it (4:6; 14:2, 4). It was the people who, in the author's view, had forfeited the covenant as a result of their idolatry (4:8; 14:3) or, more generally, "on account of their sins" (14:1). *Barnabas* 4:8 links Israel's loss of the covenant in an explicitly causal way with the subsequent reception by the author's readers of a covenant associated with Jesus,⁴ a connection that seems to require a massive temporal leap that all but erases the subsequent history of Israel. *Barnabas* 14:4–5 likewise connects Christian inheritance of the covenant with Israel's loss in a seemingly causal way, although 14:5 leaves room for doubting whether the intervening history of Israel is completely overlooked.⁵

⁴ συνετριβή αὐτῶν ἡ διαθήκη, ἵνα ἡ τοῦ ἡγαπημένου Ἰησοῦ ἐνκατασφραγισθῇ εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἡμῶν ἐν ἐλπίδι τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ. The syntax would normally suggest that "the [covenant] of the beloved Jesus" refers to something different than "their covenant." This is counter to Barnabas's predominant tendency to speak simply of "the covenant." Cf. esp. 13:1, 6 and 14:4–5 where it is a question not of a succession of (old and new) covenants, but of who may lay claim to "the covenant." Barnabas never cites Jer 31:31–34 and never uses the phrase "new covenant." On one occasion Barnabas does refer to the "new law" (2:6).

⁵ Whereas the shattering of the tablets is immediately followed by a ἵνα clause in 4:8, in 14:4 the sequence of the author's argument is interrupted by the pedagogical question "How did we receive [the covenant]? (πῶς δὲ ἡμεῖς ἐλάβομεν;)." The subsequent juxtaposition of Moses and Jesus as mediators of the covenant does, by its very nature, effect a

Table 1-1 Synoptic Presentation of Barn. 4:6-8 and 14:1-4

Barn. 4:6b-8	Barn. 14:1-4a
<p>... those people lost it completely (εἰς τέλος ἀπώλεσαν αὐτήν) in the following way, when Moses had just received it.</p>	<p>But let us see if he has actually given the covenant which he swore to the fathers he would give to the people. He has indeed given it; but they were not worthy to receive it (οὐκ ἐγένοντο ἄξιοι λαβεῖν) because of their sins.</p>
<p>For the Scripture says: "And Moses was on the mountain fasting for forty days and forty nights, and he received the covenant from the Lord, stone tablets inscribed by the finger of the hand of the Lord."</p>	<p>For the prophet says: "And Moses was fasting on Mount Sinai forty days and forty nights, in order to receive the Lord's covenant with the people. And Moses received from the Lord the two tablets which were inscribed by the finger of the hand of the Lord in the spirit."</p>
<p>But by turning to idols they lost it (ἀπώλεσαν αὐτήν).</p>	<p>And when Moses received them he began to carry them down to give to the people.</p>
<p>For thus says the Lord: "Moses, Moses, go down quickly, because your people, whom you led out of the land of Egypt, have broken the Law."</p>	<p>And the Lord said to Moses: "Moses, Moses, go down quickly, because your people, whom you led out of the land of Egypt, have broken the Law."</p>
<p>And Moses understood and hurled the two tablets from his hands, and their covenant was broken in pieces (καὶ συνετρίβη αὐτῶν ἡ διαθήκη),</p>	<p>And Moses understood that once again they had made cast images for themselves, and he hurled the tablets from his hands, and the tablets of the Lord's covenant were broken in pieces (καὶ συνετρίβησαν αἱ πλάκες τῆς διαθήκης κυρίου).</p>
<p>in order that the covenant of the beloved Jesus might be sealed in our heart, in hope inspired by faith in him.</p>	<p>So, Moses received it, but they were not worthy (οὐκ ἐγένοντο ἄξιοι).⁶</p>

chronological leap, but 14:5 presupposes an intervening period in which Israel has continued to pile up its sin. Further evidence that Barnabas has an interest in the intervening history of Israel is explored in the pages that follow.

⁶ The translation of 4:6-8 and 14:1-4 above is that of M. W. Holmes (*The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999]), with minor revisions to show the parallelism of the two passages more clearly (e.g., the consistent

At first glance, the radical truncation of Israel's history — the assertion that Israel forfeited the covenant before they ever took possession of it — seems to be of a piece with the radical nullification of the Jewish cultic system evinced throughout the document. Barnabas seems to have little difficulty declaring that literal sacrifices were never valid (2:4–10), true fasting bespeaks a concern for justice rather than abstention from food (3:1–6), circumcision was always a matter of the heart or ears (9:1–5), the dietary laws were simply intended as morality tales for desirable and undesirable behavior (10:1–12), sanctification of the sabbath refers to an eschatological reality (15:1–9), and no material building could ever be considered the temple of God (16:1–10). While Barnabas's view of cultic matters may have had precursors such as the radical allegorists known to Philo (*Migr.* 89–92),⁷ among Christian writers Barnabas seems to stand alone in his ruthless dismissal not only of the Jewish cult but of the post-Sinaitic history of Israel. Not a few scholars have felt compelled to compare the author with Marcion, despite their diametrically opposite approaches to the Jewish Scriptures.⁸

Reidar Hvalvik summarizes the author's point of view as follows:

While most early Christian writers thought within the scheme of salvation-historical epochs, Barnabas did not. Consequently the Jews had no place in the history of salvation; they had no independent value and importance. They were nothing but a disobedient people who had turned away from God to idols. For that reason they were not heirs of the covenant.⁹

As a description of Barnabas's point of view, the second half of this assertion is on firmer ground than the first. Barnabas does view the story of Israel as the story of a disobedient, idolatrous people. But does the author really mean what he says when he suggests that Israel never took possession of God's

translation of *συνῆκεν*, *ἔριψεν*, and *συνετρίβη / συνετρίβησαν* [4:8; 14:3] as “understood,” “hurled,” and “was / were broken in pieces,” respectively).

⁷ Cf. H. Windisch, *Die apostolischen Väter III. Der Barnabasbrief* (HNT Ergänzungsband; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1920) 395. Windisch thinks that direct influence from such groups is possible but not necessary. For a discussion of Philo's place within the allegorical tradition at Alexandria, see D. M. Hay, “Philo's References to Other Allegorists,” *SPhilo* 6 (1979/80) 41–75.

⁸ J. Alvarez, “Apostolic Writings and the Roots of Anti-Semitism,” in *Studia Patristica* 13/2 (ed. E. A. Livingstone; TU 116; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1975) 73; F. M. Th. de Liagre Böhl, “Christentum, Judentum und Altes Testament in ihrem gegenseitigen Verhältnis nach dem Brief des Barnabas,” in *Schrift en uitleg* (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok, 1970) 95–111, esp. 109–11; E. Mihaly, “A Rabbinic Defense of the Election of Israel: An Analysis of Sifre Deuteronomy 32:9, Pirqe 312,” *HUCA* 35 (1964) 121; P. Meinhold, “Geschichte und Exegese im Barnabasbrief,” *ZKG* 59 (1940) 257.

⁹ Hvalvik, *Struggle*, 330. Cf. Carleton Paget, *Barnabas*, 228; K. Wengst, *Didache (Apostellehre). Barnabasbrief. Zweiter Klemensbrief. Schrift an Diognet* (Schriften des Urchristentums 2; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984) 131.

covenant at Sinai? Is it a valid inference that Barnabas has no concept of salvation history or are there reasons for questioning such a conclusion?¹⁰

When one looks closely at other passages in the *Epistle of Barnabas* and reflects on the presuppositions of some of his arguments, several contradictions emerge between these presuppositions and the notion that Israel forfeited its covenant status forever at Sinai. One of the most obvious of these is Barnabas's citation of authority figures from the later history of Israel. A second is the author's allegorical or typological rereading of certain OT passages. Some of these pertain to laws or rituals instituted after the golden-calf incident, and at least one post-Sinaitic event is also included. In both cases, however, the larger issue is the implication that God continues to reveal his salvific intentions and that Israel can be held accountable for recognizing them. A third contradiction proceeds from the first two and involves evidence that Barnabas knows of a gospel mission to Israel. A fourth, extending from the first three, consists of declarations that it was the rejection of Jesus that brought Israel's sins to completion. All of these represent a problem for the assumption that Israel was abandoned at Sinai; collectively, they suggest that God's dealings with Israel continue until the time of Jesus.¹¹

If the covenant was lost forever as a result of the golden-calf incident, the logical conclusion would be to exclude all subsequent traces of God's dealing with Israel, whether these traces took the form of events, ritual legislation, or individuals whose words might claim prophetic importance. In point of fact, Barnabas completely excludes none of these. The most obvious transgression of this logic is the author's extensive citation of the prophets, precisely to prove how Israel should have understood the Law. Barnabas cites or alludes to the text of Isaiah more than 20 times and to Jeremiah roughly a half-dozen times; the prophetic authority of David is invoked

¹⁰ An older generation of scholarship inclined at times to read the *Epistle of Barnabas* through the lens of the theology of Paul or of the Epistle to the Hebrews. This was most evident when scholars described the author's perspective using terms like "old [and new] covenant" or spoke of an "old Law" possessing temporary validity. Cf., e.g., J. Muilenburg, *The Literary Relations of the Epistle of Barnabas and the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (Marburg: n.p., 1929) 53, 61. Subsequent scholarship, recognizing this pitfall, has allowed Barnabas's radical assertions to speak for themselves and concluded, perhaps too hastily, that this precludes notions of "salvation history" (see n. 9 above). There have, nevertheless, been exceptions, esp. R. A. Kraft, *Barnabas and the Didache* (The Apostolic Fathers 3; New York: Nelson, 1965) 33–34; cf. P. Prigent and R. A. Kraft, *Épître de Barnabé* (SC 172; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971) 30–33.

¹¹ I want to emphasize that my goal is not to resolve all of Barnabas's inconsistencies or contradictions (a fool's errand, in the judgment of most commentators) but to explore what seems to me a glaring, fundamental contradiction that directly bears upon the author's view of Israel's legacy and, quite possibly, his purpose in writing.

(explicitly) in 10:10 and 12:10, although Barnabas's recourse to the Psalter is much more extensive.¹² Allusions to or loose citations of Ezekiel (*Barn.* 6:14), Daniel (*Barn.* 4:4–5), and Zechariah (*Barn.* 2:8; cf. 5:12) also occur. From Isaiah alone, Barnabas will prove that God does not desire sacrifices (*Barn.* 2:5), rejects a literal observance of the sabbath (2:5; 15:8), considers justice the essence of true fasting (3:1–5), disdains those who are clever in their own eyes (4:11), revealed Christ's sufferings in advance (5:2, 14; 6:7), foreshadowed baptism (11:5), and foretold the conversion of the Gentiles (9:1; 14:7–9). Likewise he asserts on Jeremiah's authority the rejection of sacrifice (*Barn.* 2:7), the demand for a circumcised heart (9:1, 5), and Israel's guilt for rejecting baptism (11:2). David's authority is invoked to corroborate a spiritualized understanding of the dietary laws (*Barn.* 10:10) and to reject a royal Davidic notion of messiah (12:10b, 11b).

Recourse to such authority is a rather obvious inconsistency if one maintains at the same time that God abandoned Israel long ago at Sinai. Franz de Liagre Böhl poses the problem as follows:

Hatte also Gott keinen Bund mehr mit der Juden, so hatte er auch keine Verpflichtung an dieselben, sie über ihren Irrtum aufzuklären. . . . Man könnte mit Recht fragen, weshalb alle heiligen Männer denn immer gerade dem verhassten jüdischen Volken entstammten.¹³

The fact that Israel can be faulted for failing to understand the Law and the prophets presupposes two things: that God continues to reveal his intentions through particular individuals in Israel's history, and that Israel is expected to respond to these intentions. Both imply that Israel's relationship to God, despite being marked by continual failure, remains in some sense intact.

Barnabas's allegorical or typological rereading of certain OT passages poses similar issues. One aspect of the problem is that the rituals, laws, or events in question at times postdate the golden-calf debacle. The other is the implication that God continues to reveal his salvific intentions *to Israel*. For example, two events pertaining to the wilderness generation serve Barnabas as prophetic types of the crucifixion. These types are the outstretched hands of Moses during the war with Amalek (12:2–3; cf. Exod 17:8–16) and the bronze serpent lifted up on the wooden pole (12:5–7; cf. Num 21:6–9). Both are signs *for the people of Israel* to place their hope in Jesus, the only way they can be saved (12:2, 3, 7). Both events are reminders that those who perish do so because of their own sins and transgressions (12:2, 5). The Amalek episode belongs to the period before the apostasy at Sinai, the bronze serpent episode to the period after. Amazingly Barnabas can draw similar conclusions from each. Closely related is the author's claim that Moses gave the son of Nave his name (cf. Num 13:16) "for the sole purpose that all the

¹² Cf. *Barn.* 2:10; 5:13; 6:4, 6, 16; 9:1, 2; 10:10; 11:6–7; 12:10.

¹³ De Liagre Böhl, "Christentum, Judentum, und Altes Testament," 107.

people (παῖς ὁ λαός) might hear that the Father was revealing everything about his Son *Jesus*” (12:8). Barnabas seems to confuse the (post-Sinaitic) reconnaissance of the promised land with the (pre-Sinaitic) war against Amalek (*Barn.* 12:8–10; cf. Exod 17:14; Num 13:16), and so perhaps the chronological issue should not be pressed.¹⁴ But the implication is clear enough that God reveals *to Israel* hints of his salvific purpose in Jesus (12:2, 3, 6, 7, 8), a salvific purpose that explicitly *includes Israel*. The implication is similar when Barnabas reinterprets Moses’ command, “Enter into the good land, which the Lord promised, . . . a land flowing with milk and honey” as “set your hope upon Jesus, who is about to be revealed to you in the flesh” (6:8–9; cf. Exod 33:1, 3). This command is specifically addressed “to them” (i.e., Israel) even if Barnabas ultimately concludes that it has only found fulfillment in the Christians (6:16).

Other passages pose problems of a different sort for the notion that God has cast off his people at Sinai. Barnabas offers allegorical readings of rituals pertaining to the Day of Atonement (7:3–11; cf. Leviticus 16), the rite of the red heifer (8:1–7; cf. Numbers 19), and the dietary laws (10:1–12; cf. Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14). In all three cases the scriptural directives are given subsequent to the apostasy at Sinai. If it is true that Israel has lost its covenant status at Sinai, and if, as critics often allege, Barnabas has tendentiously suppressed the second giving of the Law,¹⁵ one could ask why Barnabas even bothers to deal with such rites and laws.¹⁶ Admittedly, Israel’s role is portrayed far more negatively in the typologies of chaps. 7–8 than in those of chap. 12; emphasis centers on the role of the priests and the people in the suffering death of Jesus.¹⁷ Yet Barnabas seems to imply that

¹⁴ The change of name from Hoshea to Joshua (“Jesus”) is mentioned in Num 13:16, in conjunction with the sending of the spies into Canaan. However the first reference in the OT to “Joshua” (“Jesus”) is in Exod 17:14, in conjunction with battle against Amalek (a prior episode).

¹⁵ According to M. Simon (*Verus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (AD 135–425)* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986; repr. Portland, OR: Vallentine, Mitchell & Co, 1996] 88) Barnabas “systematically ignores the incident” and thus “falsifies the whole historical reconstruction.” Cf. J. Kleivinghaus, *Die theologische Stellung der Apostolischen Väter zur alttestamentlichen Offenbarung* (BFCT 44:1; Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1948) 18 n. 4.

¹⁶ There is no trace in *Barnabas* of the so-called “deuterosis” argument, whereby the majority of Israel’s ritual code is associated with the second giving of the law (Exodus 34) and regarded as punitive (see Simon, *Verus Israel*, 88–91). Contrast R. A. Kraft (*The Epistle of Barnabas: Its Quotations and Their Sources* [Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1961] 133–35) who suggests that something resembling this view might be implied.

¹⁷ *Barnabas* 7:3–5 reflects a distinction between the priests and the common people that seems to imply the greater culpability of the former. This distinction is not apparent elsewhere.

things could have been different; Israel failed to discern what God intended “because they did not listen to the voice of the Lord” (8:7).

It is difficult to reconcile the notion that God has cast off his people at Sinai with the notion that he continues to admonish and hold them accountable. It is even more difficult to accommodate the notion that God continues to reveal his salvific intentions to an abandoned people. The difficulty is aggravated still further as one identifies places where Barnabas even presupposes a gospel mission to Israel. We have already observed that this has been foreshadowed in the typologies of chap. 12 (12:2, 3, 6, 7, 8) and in the reinterpretation of Moses’ command to enter the land flowing with milk and honey (6:8). In 5:8 Barnabas asserts that Jesus himself “by teaching Israel and performing extraordinary wonders and signs, . . . preached and loved them intensely” (διδάσκων τὸν Ἰσραὴλ . . . ἐκήρυξεν καὶ ὑπερηγάπησεν αὐτόν). Taken at face value, Barnabas asserts that Jesus spoke and acted with benevolent intentions toward the nation. Such an inconsistency with the notion that Israel was abandoned at Sinai is all the more glaring in light of Barnabas’s high christology.¹⁸

There is, however, some doubt about the original reading of 5:8. The text cited above reflects the reading of V/G and is adopted by Windisch, Wengst, Holmes, and Prostmeier.¹⁹ Jesus is the implied subject of each of the verbs; αὐτόν refers back to τὸν Ἰσραὴλ. Sinaiticus (S/Ν), however, reads ἐκήρυσσεν καὶ ὑπερηγάπησαν αὐτόν, essentially reversing the subject of the final verb and the referent of αὐτόν, “they [Israel] loved him [Jesus] intensely.” The Bryennios manuscript (C/H) reads as S/Ν, but with a preceding negation, οὐχ ὅτι ἐκήρυσσεν καὶ ὑπερηγάπησαν αὐτόν, the sense of which might be rendered somewhat loosely as “in spite of the fact that he preached they did not love him.”²⁰ While it shares the negation of C/H, the Latin version is unique: *non crediderunt nec dilexerunt illum*, “they did not believe nor love him.”

¹⁸ Jesus is God’s Son (5:9, 11; 6:12; 12:8, 10), his beloved (3:6; 4:3). He is preexistent (5:5; 6:12), the Lord of the whole world (5:5; cf. 7:2) who manifested himself in the flesh (5:6, 10, 11; 6:7, 9, 14; 12:10) and will return again as judge (5:7; 7:2; 21:3 cf. 4:12; 15:5). Jesus is thus intimately associated with God’s salvific intentions from beginning (creation) to end (judgment), intentions that, according to Barnabas, God has continually revealed. Not surprisingly, it is difficult at times to determine whether Barnabas’s use of κύριος refers to Jesus or to God (e.g., 4:12).

¹⁹ Windisch, *Barnabasbrief*, 329; Wengst, *Schriften*, 198 n. 75; Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 284; F. R. Prostmeier, *Der Barnabasbrief* (KAV 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1999) 232–33. Holmes prefers the imperfect ἐκήρυσσεν attested by both S/Ν and C/H to the aorist ἐκήρυξεν of V/G, but this difference is not germane to the point under discussion.

²⁰ An emendation of οὐχ ὅτι to οὐχ ὅτε has occasionally been suggested.

Prigent, who judges the Latin reading an obvious scribal amelioration, likewise dismisses both S/Ν and V/G as impossible, indeed, incompatible with *Barn.* 4:14 and 5:11.²¹ In so doing, he overlooks a very real difference between S/Ν and V/G: Barnabas may have found it impossible to say that Israel responded to Jesus with love (S/Ν), but would he have found it impossible to say that Jesus loved Israel (V/G)? The latter is part and parcel of the same crux that one meets in some of the author's typologies, where Israel can be faulted for failing to see how God foreshadowed the saving work of Christ. It is not simply Israel's inadequate response that constitutes the problem but the author's presupposition that God continues to communicate his salvific intentions. The latter alone creates palpable tensions with the idea that Israel was forever abandoned at Sinai.

In terms of transcriptional probabilities, the inadvertent corruption of ὑπερηγάπησεν (V/G) to ὑπερηγάπησαν (S/Ν) seems more credible than the loss of οὐχ ὅτι necessary to defend either C/H or L as original. One can certainly comprehend how the text of S/Ν might elicit precisely the type of correction attested in C/H. Although I consider the reading attested in V/G most likely to be original, the point at issue does not depend upon this judgment. The very fact that Israel can be faulted for failing to respond to the preaching of Jesus raises the issue of God's intentions and Israel's accountability, moot points if Israel had been abandoned long before. The text of V/G, by stressing Jesus' benevolence, only underlines the point.

There is evidence in at least two other passages that Barnabas presupposes a preaching mission to Israel. In his allegorical reading of the rite of the red heifer, Barnabas recounts an extrabiblical detail about children who sprinkle the people with the ashes. These children are "those who preached to us the good news about the forgiveness of sins and the purification of the heart, those to whom he gave the authority to proclaim the gospel; *there were twelve of them as a witness to the tribes, because there are twelve tribes of Israel*" (8:3, emphasis mine). It might be objected that a preaching mission to Israel is not in view here for two reasons: first, the role assigned to Israel elsewhere in this passage is markedly negative and, second, the witness motif could itself be negative rather than positive. There can be no denying that Israel is otherwise treated negatively in this allegory because they (or at least their leaders) are assigned responsibility for the death of Jesus and described as those "whose sins are complete" (8:1). But the second objection cannot be pressed too far. *Barn.* 8:3b concludes with two εἰς clauses: εἰς μαρτύριον τῶν φυλῶν ("as a witness to the tribes") and εἰς τὸ κηρύσσειν (lit., "for the

²¹ Prigent (*Barnabé*, 110–11) states, "Jamais Barnabé n'a pu écrire que les Juifs ont répondu par l'amour à la prédication du Christ."

purpose of preaching”).²² The proximity of these parallel constructions and their similar content suggest that they should be interpreted in light of each other, thus giving μαρτύριον a positive sense. More importantly, a positive meaning is also favored by the parallel expression in the next verse: “as a witness (εἰς μαρτύριον) to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. . . .”²³ Finally there is also *Barn.* 11:1–2, which cites Jer 2:12–13 as proof that Israel “would never accept the baptism that brings forgiveness of sins. . . .” Can Israel be accused of such a rejection unless one presupposes that Israel, too, was offered the gospel? Are such offers made to a people abandoned long before? Will one even bother to admonish a people that has already been rejected once and for all?

There has thus far been significant evidence to suggest that Barnabas thinks that even after Sinai, Israel’s relationship with God remained, in some sense, intact. The most important reason for questioning the notion that Israel lost its covenant status forever at Sinai is the author’s repeated assertion that the sins of Israel reached full measure with the rejection of Jesus (5:11; 8:1; 14:5). In 5:11 Barnabas states, “Therefore the Son of God came in the flesh for this reason, that he might complete the full measure of the sins (ἵνα τὸ τέλειον τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἀνακεφαλαιώσῃ) of those who persecuted his prophets to death.” Barnabas makes a similar statement in 14:5 (ἵνα κάκεινοι τελειωθῶσιν τοῖς ἀμαρτήμασιν) and suggests that it was at this point that ownership of the covenant was transferred.²⁴ Yet divine abandonment or loss of the covenant *at Sinai* would imply that sins had already reached the critical threshold. The historical sweep implied by 5:11 is especially noteworthy, as is its inclusion of Jesus in the line of rejected prophets. It is precisely Barnabas’s citation of the prophets and his claims of christological foreshadowing that have already placed a question mark over his interpretation of the golden-calf incident. The author’s emphasis on Israel’s rejection of Jesus is of a piece with the anomalous data previously noted.

²² οἷς ἔδωκεν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τὴν ἐξουσίαν, οὓσιν δεκαδύο εἰς μαρτύριον τῶν φυλῶν (ὅτι δεκαδύο φυλαὶ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ) εἰς τὸ κηρύσσειν.

²³ The puzzling shift from twelve children to three is a mark of the tradition-critical complexity of the passage and suggests that while 8:3 is Barnabas’s own interpretation, 8:4 is inherited. An alternative possibility is that the children are understood as symbols of the apostles only because they sprinkle with purifying water, while the reference to the apostles as twelve in number is a parenthetical digression that has nothing to do with the number of the children.

²⁴ The third instance of such language, found in the author’s allegorical interpretation of the red-heifer ritual (*Barn.* 8:1–2), is ambiguous. Although the heifer [= Jesus] is slaughtered by “the men whose sins are complete” (τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐν οἷς εἰσὶν ἀμαρτίαι τέλειαι), the temporal relationship between the killing of Jesus and the “completion” of sins is not specified.

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Verse references below are based upon the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible. In the text of this monograph, it has occasionally been necessary to make direct reference to the text of the LXX. In such cases, the entries below also give LXX versification in brackets.

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