

The Epistle of Barnabas

Modern English version · SermonIndex

Anonymous (attributed to Barnabas) · c. AD 70-135

An anonymous letter, traditionally ascribed to Barnabas the companion of Paul, written sometime between about AD 70 and 135. It reads the Old Testament as pointing to Christ, and it ends with the teaching of the Two Ways.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Greetings, sons and daughters, in the name of the Lord who loved us, in peace.

1.2 Since God's righteous decrees toward you are great and rich, I am overjoyed beyond all measure at your blessed and glorious spirits. So deeply implanted in you is the grace of the spiritual gift you have received.

1.3 That is why I congratulate myself all the more in my hope of being saved. For I truly see that the Spirit has been poured out on you from the Lord's rich fountain. So greatly did the sight of you, which I had longed for, amaze me.

Translator's note. The author writes as one who has been among his readers ("having spoken among you," 1.4). Nothing in the letter says where they live.

1.4 I am convinced of this, and I know within myself that since I spoke among you I understand many things, because the Lord has traveled with me on the way of righteousness. So I too am wholly compelled to love you more than my own life, because great faith and love live in you, in the hope of his life.

1.5 I have reasoned that if I take care to share with you something of what I have received, I will have a reward for serving spirits like yours. So I have hurried to write to you briefly, so that along with your faith you may have perfect knowledge.

Translator's note. "Knowledge" (gnōsis) is a key word for the author. He

mainly means a right understanding of the Scriptures, especially how they point to Christ.

1.6 There are three teachings of the Lord. The hope of life is the beginning and end of our faith. Righteousness is the beginning and end of judgment. And love, shown in joy and gladness, is the witness of works of righteousness.

Translator's note. The Greek word is dogmata, "decrees" or "teachings." The sentence is compressed and its meaning is debated. The three are hope, righteousness and love.

1.7 For through the prophets the Master has made known to us what is past and what is present, and he has given us a first taste of what is to come. As we see these things come about one by one, just as he said, we ought to draw near to him with fuller and higher reverence.

1.8 I am not writing as a teacher. I am one of you, and I will point out a few things that will cheer you now.

Chapter 2

2.1 The days are evil, and the one who works evil holds power. So we must pay attention to ourselves and seek out the Lord's requirements.

Translator's note. The Greek says literally "the one who is at work," meaning the devil. Compare [Ephesians 2:2](#), "the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience."

2.2 Fear and endurance help our faith, and patience and self-control fight alongside us.

2.3 While these stay pure toward the Lord, wisdom, understanding, insight, and knowledge rejoice with them.

2.4 For he has shown us through all the prophets that he has no need of sacrifices, burnt offerings, or gifts. He says in one place:

2.5 "What is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? says the Lord. I am full of burnt offerings. I do not want the fat of lambs, or the blood of bulls and goats, not even when you come to appear before me. For who asked for these things from your hands? You will no longer trample my courts. If you bring fine flour, it is worthless. Incense is an abomination to me. I cannot stand your new moons and Sabbaths."

Translator's note. The quotation is from [Isaiah 1:11-13](#), in the Greek (Septuagint) form, shortened and reworded a little.

Scripture: [Isaiah 1:1-15](#)

2.6 So he abolished these things, so that the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is free from the yoke of compulsion, might have

an offering that is not made by human hands.

Translator's note. Here the author goes beyond the prophets. He says God abolished the sacrifices, not merely that God disliked sacrifice offered in the wrong spirit. Later (chapters 9-10) he argues that the Jews misread the Law from the start by taking it literally.

2.7 And again he says to them: “Did I command your fathers, when they came out of the land of Egypt, to bring me burnt offerings and sacrifices?”

Translator's note. [Jeremiah 7:22](#), quoted loosely. Jeremiah is usually understood as rebuking empty ritual rather than denying that God gave laws about sacrifice.

Scripture: [Jeremiah 7:22-23](#)

2.8 “No, this is what I commanded them: Let each of you hold no grudge in his heart against his neighbor, and do not love a false oath.”

Translator's note. Compare [Zechariah 8:17](#).

2.9 So if we are not foolish, we should grasp the kindly purpose of our Father. He is speaking to us because he does not want us to wander as those people did, but to ask how we may come to him.

2.10 So he says to us: “A sacrifice to the Lord is a broken heart. A fragrant offering to the Lord is a heart that glorifies the one who made it.” We must, then, be careful about our salvation, brothers, so that the evil one does not slip error in among us and fling us out of our life.

Translator's note. The first line echoes [Psalm 51:17](#). The second line is not found in the Old Testament, and its source is uncertain.

Chapter 3

3.1 Again he says to them about these things: “Why do you fast for me, says the Lord, so that today your voice is heard in shouting? This is not the fast I chose, says the Lord: not a person humbling his soul,

Translator's note. Sections 3.1-3.5 quote [Isaiah 58:4-10](#), in a form close to the Greek (Septuagint).

Scripture: [Isaiah 58:4-5](#)

3.2 nor bending your neck like a hoop, nor putting on sackcloth and lying on ashes. Not even then will you call it an acceptable fast.”

3.3 But to us he says: “This is the fast that I chose, says the Lord: loosen every bond of injustice, undo the knots of violent contracts, send the oppressed away free, and tear up every unjust document. Break your bread for the hungry. If you see someone naked, clothe him. Bring the homeless into your house. If you see someone lowly,

do not despise him, nor any of your own flesh and blood.”

Translator’s note. The author applies this passage to “us,” the Christians, as opposed to “them,” the Jews (compare 3.1).

3.4 “Then your light will break out early, and your garments will quickly spring up. Righteousness will go before you, and the glory of God will surround you.”

Translator’s note. Where the Greek Isaiah (58:8) has “your healing” (iamata), Barnabas’s text has “your garments” (himatia). The two words look alike, and the change may come from the author’s copy of Isaiah or from later copyists.

3.5 “Then you will cry out, and God will listen to you. While you are still speaking he will say, ‘Here I am.’ If you take away from yourself the chain, the pointing finger, and the word of grumbling, and give your bread to the hungry from your heart, and take pity on the humbled soul.”

Translator’s note. “The pointing finger” translates cheirotomia, literally “stretching out the hand.” The Hebrew of [Isaiah 58:9](#) speaks of “the pointing of the finger,” a gesture of scorn or accusation.

3.6 So, brothers, the patient one foresaw that the people he prepared in his Beloved would believe in simple innocence. He showed us everything beforehand, so that we would not be shipwrecked by becoming converts to their law.

Translator’s note. “His Beloved” is Jesus. The word for “converts” (epēlytoi) means newcomers who join a people from outside, much like “proselytes.”

Chapter 4

4.1 We must therefore search carefully into the present, and look for what can save us. Let us flee completely from every work of lawlessness, in case the works of lawlessness overtake us. Let us hate the error of this present time, so that we may be loved in the time to come.

4.2 Let us not give our souls so free a rein that they can run with sinners and evil people, in case we become like them.

4.3 The final stumbling block is near. Scripture speaks about it, as Enoch says. For this is why the Master has cut short the times and the days: so that his Beloved may hurry and come into his inheritance.

Translator’s note. Compare Jesus’ saying that the days will be cut short ([Matthew 24:22](#); [Mark 13:20](#)).

4.4 The prophet also says this: “Ten kingdoms will reign on the earth, and a little king will rise up after them, who will humble three of the kings at once.”

Translator's note. This is a loose paraphrase of [Daniel 7:24](#), not Daniel's exact wording. The author applies it to the end of the age.

4.5 In the same way Daniel speaks about this: "And I saw the fourth beast, evil and strong and more fierce than all the beasts of the sea, and how ten horns grew from it, and from them a small offshoot horn, and how it humbled three of the great horns at once."

Translator's note. A free quotation of [Daniel 7:7-8](#).

Scripture: [Daniel 7:7](#)

4.6 You must understand this. And I ask you this as well, as one of you, and as one who loves all of you more than my own life: watch yourselves now. Do not become like certain people, piling up your sins by saying that the covenant is both theirs and ours.

Translator's note. Whether the covenant belongs to both Jews and Christians is a central question of the letter. The author's answer is that it is "ours" alone, and that Israel lost it (4.7-8; 14.1-4).

4.7 It is ours. But they lost it completely, in this way, right after Moses had received it. For the Scripture says: "And Moses was on the mountain fasting forty days and forty nights, and he received the covenant from the Lord, tablets of stone written by the finger of the hand of the Lord."

Translator's note. This draws on [Exodus 31:18](#) and 34:28, and most closely on [Deuteronomy 9:9-11](#), which has both the forty days and nights and the tablets written by God's finger.

4.8 But they turned to idols and lost it. For the Lord says this: "Moses, Moses, go down quickly, for your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have broken the law." And Moses understood, and threw the two tablets from his hands, and their covenant was shattered, so that the covenant of the beloved Jesus might be sealed in our hearts in the hope of faith in him.

Translator's note. See [Exodus 32:7](#), 19 and [Deuteronomy 9:12-17](#). The author claims the broken tablets mean Israel lost the covenant for good. The Old Testament itself records that God renewed the covenant with Israel after the golden calf ([Exodus 34](#)).

4.9 I would like to write much more. But I have hurried to write, not as a teacher but as befits someone who loves you and does not want to leave out anything we have. I am your humble servant. So let us watch ourselves in these last days. All the time of our faith will do us no good unless we stand firm now, in this lawless time and against the stumbling blocks to come, as befits sons of God, so that the Black One gets no way in.

Translator's note. "The Black One" is a title for the devil. It appears again in 20.1.

4.10 Let us flee from all emptiness. Let us utterly hate the works of the evil way. Do not slip off by yourselves and live alone as though you were already justified, but come together and look into what

serves the common good.

4.11 For the Scripture says: “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.” Let us be spiritual. Let us be a perfect temple for God. As far as it is in us, let us practice the fear of God and struggle to keep his commandments, so that we may rejoice in his requirements.

| *Translator’s note.* [Isaiah 5:21](#).

| *Scripture:* [Isaiah 5:21](#)

4.12 The Lord will judge the world without favoritism. Each person will receive according to what he has done. If he is good, his righteousness will go before him. If he is evil, the wages of his evil are in front of him.

4.13 Otherwise, resting easy as people who are “called,” we might doze off in our sins, and the evil ruler might gain power over us and thrust us out of the Lord’s kingdom.

4.14 And understand this too, my brothers. You see that after such great signs and wonders were done in Israel, they were abandoned even so. So let us be careful, in case we turn out to be, as it is written, “many called, but few chosen.”

| *Translator’s note.* The quotation matches [Matthew 22:14](#). Some scholars see it as the earliest quotation of a Gospel as “Scripture” (“it is written”), though Barnabas could be drawing on oral tradition.

| *Scripture:* [Matthew 20:16](#)

Chapter 5

5.1 This is why the Lord endured handing over his flesh to destruction: so that we might be made clean by the forgiveness of sins, that is, by his sprinkled blood.

5.2 For Scripture speaks about him, partly to Israel and partly to us. It says: “He was wounded for our lawless acts and made weak for our sins. By his bruise we were healed. He was led like a sheep to slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer.”

| *Translator’s note.* [Isaiah 53:5](#), 7.

5.3 So we ought to give the Lord great thanks, because he has made known to us what is past and has made us wise in the present, and we are not without understanding about what is to come.

5.4 Scripture says: “Nets are not spread unjustly for birds.” It means this: a person deserves to perish if he knows the way of righteousness and yet keeps himself in the way of darkness.

| *Translator’s note.* [Proverbs 1:17](#), quoted from the Greek Old Testament. The Hebrew says something different: it is useless to spread a net while

the bird is watching.

5.5 Here is something more, my brothers. The Lord endured suffering for our souls, though he is Lord of the whole world. God said to him before the foundation of the world, “Let us make man in our image and likeness.” So how could he endure suffering at human hands?

Translator’s note. [Genesis 1:26](#). Barnabas reads “Let us make” as the Father speaking to the Son. This reading, that the Son was with God at creation, is common in the early Fathers.

5.6 Learn this. The prophets, who received grace from him, prophesied about him. And since he had to appear in the flesh, he endured suffering, in order to put an end to death and show the resurrection from the dead,

5.7 and in order to fulfill the promise made to the fathers, and, while preparing the new people for himself, to show during his time on earth that he himself will raise the dead and then judge.

5.8 Moreover, he taught Israel and did such great wonders and signs, and preached to them, and loved them dearly.

5.9 But when he chose his own apostles, who were to preach his gospel, he chose men who were lawless beyond every kind of sin, to show that he “did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” It was then that he showed himself to be the Son of God.

Translator’s note. The saying is from [Matthew 9:13](#) (and [Mark 2:17](#)). The claim that the apostles were “lawless beyond every kind of sin” goes beyond anything the Gospels say.

5.10 For if he had not come in the flesh, people could never have been saved by looking at him. After all, when people look at the sun, which will one day cease to be and is the work of his hands, they cannot look straight into its rays.

Translator’s note. The Greek verb for “saved” can also mean “kept safe.” So the author may mean that no one could have survived seeing him unveiled, just as no one can stare at the sun.

5.11 So the Son of God came in the flesh for this reason: to bring to completion the full measure of sins of those who persecuted his prophets to death.

Translator’s note. Compare [Matthew 23:31–32](#) and [1 Thessalonians 2:15–16](#).

5.12 That is why he endured it. For God says that the wounding of his flesh came from them: “When they strike their own shepherd, then the sheep of the flock will perish.”

Translator’s note. This is from [Zechariah 13:7](#), but in a form that differs from the Greek Old Testament and from Jesus’ quotation in [Matthew 26:31](#) (“I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered”).

5.13 He chose to suffer in this way, for he had to suffer on a tree. For the one who prophesies about him says: “Spare my soul from the sword,” and “Nail my flesh, for gatherings of evildoers have risen up against me.”

Translator’s note. The first quotation is close to [Psalm 22:20](#) (21:21 in the Greek). “Nail my flesh” comes from [Psalm 119:120](#) (118:120 in the Greek), where the Greek reads “nail my flesh with the fear of you.” The rest echoes [Psalm 22:16](#) (21:17 in the Greek). The author combines these lines and reads them as the voice of Christ.

5.14 And again he says: “See, I have set my back to the whips and my cheeks to blows, and I have set my face like solid rock.”

Translator’s note. [Isaiah 50:6-7](#).

Chapter 6

6.1 So when he had carried out the command, what does he say? “Who is the one who takes me to court? Let him stand against me. Or who is the one who seeks justice against me? Let him come near to the servant of the Lord.”

Translator’s note. [Isaiah 50:8](#). In Isaiah the line ends “let him come near to me.” The words “the servant of the Lord” (pais) are not in 50:8, though compare “his servant” in 50:10. The author reads the servant as Christ.

6.2 “Woe to you, for you will all grow old like a garment, and the moth will eat you.” And the prophet says again that he was set as a strong stone to crush: “See, I will lay in the foundations of Zion a stone, precious, chosen, a cornerstone, honored.”

Translator’s note. [Isaiah 50:9](#) and 28:16. Peter quotes the same stone passage ([1 Peter 2:6](#)).

Scripture: [Isaiah 28:16](#); [1 Peter 2:6](#)

6.3 Then what does he say? “And whoever hopes in him will live forever.” Is our hope then on a stone? Certainly not. He says this because the Lord has set his flesh in strength. For he says: “And he set me like solid rock.”

Translator’s note. [Isaiah 28:16](#) (Greek) reads “whoever believes in him will not be put to shame”; the words “will live forever” are not in Isaiah. The last line adapts [Isaiah 50:7](#), “I have set my face like solid rock.”

6.4 And the prophet says again: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.” And again he says: “This is the great and wonderful day that the Lord has made.”

Translator’s note. [Psalm 118:22](#), 24 (117:22, 24 in the Greek). The psalm says simply “This is the day that the Lord has made.” The words “great and wonderful” are the author’s addition, though “wonderful” appears in the verse before.

6.5 I am writing to you more plainly so you can understand. I am

the humble servant of your love.

Translator's note. The Greek word (perípsēma) literally means “scrapings” or “offscouring.” Paul uses it in [1 Corinthians 4:13](#). Here it is a conventional expression of humble devotion.

6.6 What does the prophet say again? “A gathering of evildoers has surrounded me. They have circled around me like bees around a honeycomb.” And: “They cast lots for my clothing.”

Translator's note. The author combines [Psalm 22:16](#) (21:17 in the Greek), [Psalm 118:12](#) (117:12), and [Psalm 22:18](#) (21:19), and reads them as describing Christ's crucifixion. [John 19:24](#) applies the last line to the soldiers at the cross.

6.7 So, since he was about to appear in the flesh and suffer, his suffering was shown beforehand. For the prophet says about Israel: “Woe to their soul, for they have plotted an evil plan against themselves, saying: Let us bind the righteous one, because he is a nuisance to us.”

Translator's note. The quotation is from [Isaiah 3:9-10](#) in the Greek form, which differs from the Hebrew. Wisdom of Solomon 2:12 is similar.

Scripture: [Isaiah 3:9-10](#)

6.8 What does the other prophet, Moses, say to them? “See, this is what the Lord God says: Go into the good land that the Lord swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and take it as your inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Translator's note. This is not a single verse. It is a summary of the land promise, closest to [Exodus 33:1-3](#).

6.9 But what does knowledge say? Learn it. “Hope,” it says, “in Jesus, who is about to appear to you in the flesh.” For a human being is earth that suffers, since Adam was formed from the face of the earth.

Translator's note. “Knowledge” is the author's word for the spiritual understanding of Scripture. Barnabas reads “the good land” as pointing to Christ and to the new creation. This kind of reading is called allegory.

6.10 Then what does it mean: “Into the good land, a land flowing with milk and honey”? Blessed be our Lord, brothers, who has put wisdom and understanding of his secrets in us. For the prophet speaks a parable of the Lord. Who will understand it, except the wise and knowledgeable person who loves his Lord?

6.11 Since he renewed us by the forgiveness of sins, he made us into another pattern, so that we have the souls of children, as though he were forming us anew.

6.12 For the Scripture speaks about us, when he says to the Son: “Let us make man in our image and likeness, and let them rule over the wild animals of the earth, the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea.” And when the Lord saw how good our creation was, he

said: "Increase, multiply, and fill the earth." These things were said to the Son.

Translator's note. [Genesis 1:26](#), 28. That God was speaking to the Son is the author's interpretation.

Scripture: [Genesis 1:26](#); [Genesis 1:28](#)

6.13 I will show you again how he speaks to us. In the last days he made a second creation. The Lord says: "See, I am making the last things like the first." This is what the prophet meant when he proclaimed: "Enter into a land flowing with milk and honey, and be master of it."

Translator's note. The saying about "the last things like the first" does not match any known verse of Scripture. In the Greek, "be master of it" is the same verb God uses in [Genesis 1:28](#) ("subdue it"). So the author links the promise of the land to the first creation and treats it as a promise of new creation in Christ.

Scripture: [Matthew 19:30](#); [Matthew 20:16](#)

6.14 See, then, that we have been formed anew. As he says again in another prophet: "See, says the Lord, I will take out of these people" (that is, the people the Spirit of the Lord foresaw) "their hearts of stone and put in hearts of flesh." For he himself was going to appear in the flesh and live in us.

Translator's note. [Ezekiel 11:19](#) and 36:26.

6.15 For the dwelling place of our heart, my brothers, is a holy temple for the Lord.

6.16 For the Lord says again: "By what means shall I appear before the Lord my God and be glorified?" He says: "I will give thanks to you in the assembly of my brothers, and I will sing to you in the midst of the assembly of the saints." So we are the ones whom he brought into the good land.

Translator's note. The second quotation loosely adapts [Psalm 22:22](#) (21:23 in the Greek), which [Hebrews 2:12](#) also applies to Christ; Barnabas's wording differs from the psalm.

6.17 So what is the milk and the honey? A baby is first given life with honey, then with milk. In the same way, we too are given life by faith in the promise and by the word, and we will live as masters of the earth.

6.18 We said above: "Let them increase and multiply and rule over the fish." But who is able to rule over animals, fish, or birds of the sky today? We should understand that ruling belongs to authority, so that someone gives orders and masters what is under him.

6.19 If this is not happening now, then he has told us when it will: when we ourselves have been made perfect and become heirs of the Lord's covenant.

Chapter 7

7.1 Understand this, then, children of joy: the good Lord made everything clear to us in advance, so that we would know the one to whom we ought to give thanks and praise in all things.

7.2 If the Son of God, who is Lord and is going to judge the living and the dead, suffered so that his wound might give us life, let us believe that the Son of God could not have suffered except for our sake.

7.3 But even on the cross he was given vinegar and gall to drink. Hear how the priests of the temple foretold this. There is a written commandment: “Whoever does not keep the fast will be put to death.” The Lord commanded this because he himself was going to offer the vessel of the Spirit as a sacrifice for our sins. This was so that the pattern given in Isaac, who was offered on the altar, might be fulfilled.

Translator’s note. The author takes the Day of Atonement, Isaac’s offering, and the cross as one picture. This way of reading is called typology. Here, and in the verses that follow, Barnabas builds on details that the Old Testament itself does not contain.

7.4 So what does he say in the prophet? “Let them eat of the goat offered at the fast for all their sins.” Pay close attention: “and let the priests alone, all of them, eat the entrails, unwashed, with vinegar.”

Translator’s note. Neither quotation is found in the Old Testament. In fact, [Leviticus 16:27](#) orders the Day of Atonement sin offerings to be burned outside the camp, not eaten. Where Barnabas got this wording is unknown.

7.5 Why? “Because when I am about to offer my flesh for the sins of my new people, you are going to give me gall mixed with vinegar to drink. So you alone are to eat, while the people fast and mourn in sackcloth and ashes.” This was to show that he had to suffer at their hands.

7.6 Pay attention to what he commanded: “Take two goats, good ones and alike, and offer them, and let the priest take one as a burnt offering for sins.”

Translator’s note. Compare [Leviticus 16:7-9](#). Leviticus does not say the goats must be fine and alike, and it calls the Lord’s goat a sin offering, not a burnt offering. Later Jewish tradition did require the two goats to look alike (Mishnah, Yoma 6:1).

7.7 What are they to do with the other one? “The other one is cursed,” it says. Notice how the pattern of Jesus is made clear:

Translator’s note. [Leviticus 16](#) does not call the goat sent into the wilderness cursed. Compare [Galatians 3:13](#), where Christ becomes “a curse for us.”

7.8 “Spit on it, all of you, and pierce it, and put scarlet wool around its head, and so let it be thrown into the wilderness.” When this is done, the man who carries the goat takes it into the wilderness. He removes the wool and puts it on a shrub called “rachē.” We also eat its shoots when we find them in the countryside. The fruit of the rachē alone is sweet.

Translator’s note. The “rachē” is probably a bramble, such as the blackberry, which explains the thorns mentioned in 7.11.

7.9 What does this mean? Pay attention. One goat is for the altar, and the other is cursed. And note that the cursed one is crowned. For on that day they will see him wearing the long scarlet robe down to his feet, and they will say: “Isn’t this the one whom we once crucified, despised, pierced, and spat on? Truly, this was the one who then said he was the Son of God.”

Translator’s note. Barnabas has Christ’s return in mind. Compare [Zechariah 12:10](#) (“they will look on me whom they pierced”) and [Revelation 1:7](#). For the robe down to the feet (Greek podērē), compare [Revelation 1:13](#).

7.10 How is he like the goat? The goats are alike, good, and matched, so that when they see him coming then, they will be amazed at how he is like the goat. See, then, the pattern of Jesus who was about to suffer.

7.11 And why do they put the wool among the thorns? It is a pattern of Jesus set before the church. Anyone who wants to take away the scarlet wool must suffer much, because the thorn is fearsome. Only through pain can he get hold of it. So he says: “Those who want to see me and take hold of my kingdom must receive me through affliction and suffering.”

Translator’s note. These words are presented as Jesus’ own but are not found in the Gospels. Compare [Acts 14:22](#): “through many hardships we must enter the kingdom of God.”

Chapter 8

8.1 What do you think this pattern means? Israel was commanded that men whose sins were complete should offer a heifer, slaughter it, and burn it. Then boys were to take the ashes and put them in containers, and tie scarlet wool and hyssop on a stick (see again the pattern of the cross and the scarlet wool). And so the boys were to sprinkle the people one by one, to purify them from their sins.

Translator’s note. This is the red heifer of [Numbers 19](#). Numbers says nothing about sinful men or boys. A man who is ceremonially clean gathers the ashes and does the sprinkling ([Numbers 19:9, 18](#)).

Scripture: [Numbers 19](#)

8.2 Notice how plainly he speaks to you. The calf is Jesus. The sinful men who offer it are the ones who brought him to be

slaughtered. After that there are no longer men, and no longer the glory of sinners.

Translator's note. In [Numbers 19](#) the one who burns the heifer is not described as sinful, so the identification is Barnabas's own.

8.3 The boys who sprinkle are the ones who announced to us the forgiveness of sins and the cleansing of the heart. He gave them the authority of the gospel to preach. There were twelve, as a witness to the tribes, because there are twelve tribes of Israel.

Translator's note. The twelve are the apostles. The "boys who sprinkle" come from Barnabas's retelling of the red heifer ritual in 8.1, not from [Numbers 19](#) itself.

8.4 But why are the boys who sprinkle three? As a witness to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because these were great before God.

8.5 And why is the wool on the wood? Because the kingdom of Jesus is on the wood, and because those who hope in him will live forever.

Translator's note. "The wood" here means the cross.

8.6 And why the wool and the hyssop together? Because in his kingdom there will be evil and filthy days, in which we will be saved. For a person with pain in the flesh is also healed by the filth of the hyssop.

Translator's note. Barnabas links the "filthy" days to the "filth" of the hyssop by using related Greek words. What he means by the hyssop's "filth" is unclear. It may refer to its juice or sap, which was used as a remedy.

8.7 And because of this, the things that were done this way are clear to us, but dark to them, because they did not listen to the Lord's voice.

Chapter 9

9.1 For again he speaks about the ears, and how he circumcised our heart. The Lord says in the prophet: "As soon as their ears heard, they obeyed me." And again he says: "Those far away will surely hear, and they will know what I have done." And: "Circumcise your hearts, says the Lord."

Translator's note. The quotations come from [Psalm 18:44](#), [Isaiah 33:13](#) and [Jeremiah 4:4](#). Some are quoted closely and some loosely.

Scripture: [Isaiah 33:13](#)

9.2 And again he says: "Hear, Israel, for this is what the Lord your God says." And again the Spirit of the Lord prophesies: "Who is the one who wants to live forever? Let him listen closely to the voice of my servant."

Translator's note. The second quotation is not found in this form in Scripture. It seems to blend [Psalm 34:12](#) ("Who is the one who desires life?") with [Isaiah 50:10](#) ("Let him obey the voice of his servant").

9.3 And again he says: "Hear, heaven, and listen, earth, for the Lord has spoken these things as a witness." And again he says: "Hear the word of the Lord, rulers of this people." And again he says: "Hear, children, the voice of one crying in the wilderness." So he circumcised our ears, so that when we hear the word we may believe.

Translator's note. The sources are [Isaiah 1:2](#) (Barnabas adds "as a witness"), [Isaiah 28:14](#) ("rulers of this people") and [Isaiah 40:3](#). In the last one he adds "Hear, children" before "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" and leaves out the rest of the verse.

Scripture: [Isaiah 1](#); [Isaiah 1:10](#)

9.4 But the circumcision they trust in has been done away with. For he said that circumcision was not to be of the flesh. But they went astray, because an evil angel was deceiving them.

Translator's note. Here Barnabas departs from Scripture twice. [Genesis 17:10-14](#) plainly commands circumcision of the flesh. The Bible also nowhere says that an evil angel misled Israel into practicing it. The New Testament does teach that true circumcision is of the heart ([Romans 2:28-29](#); [Colossians 2:11](#)), and so does the Old Testament ([Deuteronomy 10:16](#); [Jeremiah 4:4](#)). But these passages do not deny that God gave the physical command.

9.5 He says to them: "This is what the Lord your God says" (here I find a commandment): "Do not sow among thorns. Be circumcised to your Lord." And what does he say? "Circumcise the hardness of your heart, and do not stiffen your neck." Take this again: "See, says the Lord, all the nations are uncircumcised in the flesh, but this people is uncircumcised in heart."

Translator's note. The quotations are from [Jeremiah 4:3-4](#), [Deuteronomy 10:16](#) and [Jeremiah 9:25-26](#).

9.6 But you will say, "The people have been circumcised as a seal." So has every Syrian and Arab, and all the priests of idols. Do they too belong to their covenant? Even the Egyptians practice circumcision.

Translator's note. Paul also calls circumcision a "seal" ([Romans 4:11](#)). He calls it the seal of the righteousness Abraham had by faith.

9.7 So learn fully about everything, children of love. Abraham, the first to give circumcision, circumcised looking ahead in the Spirit to Jesus, having received the teachings of three letters.

9.8 For it says: "And Abraham circumcised eighteen and three hundred men from his household." What knowledge was given to him? Learn this: it mentions the eighteen first, and then after a pause the three hundred. The eighteen is I (ten) and H (eight): you have Jesus. And because the cross, in the letter T, was going to

have grace, he also says “three hundred.” So he shows Jesus in two letters, and the cross in the other one.

Translator’s note. Greek letters also served as numbers: iota (I) is 10, eta (H) is 8, and tau (T) is 300. The first two letters of Jesus’ name in Greek are IH, and the letter T is shaped like a cross. The number 318 comes from [Genesis 14:14](#), where it counts Abraham’s trained servants in a battle. The circumcision of his household is a different story ([Genesis 17:23–27](#)), and it gives no number. Barnabas joins the two. The word-play works only in Greek letters, not in the Hebrew of Genesis. Clement of Alexandria repeated this reading, but it is a clever symbol, not a sound reading of the text.

9.9 The one who planted the gift of his teaching in us knows this. No one has learned a more genuine message from me. But I know that you are worthy of it.

Translator’s note. “Planted” here translates the Greek adjective *emphytos* (“implanted”), which describes the gift. James uses the same word for “the implanted word” ([James 1:21](#)).

Chapter 10

10.1 Now when Moses said, “You shall not eat pork, or eagle, or hawk, or raven, or any fish that has no scales,” he had three teachings in mind.

Translator’s note. The list gathers items loosely from the food laws of [Leviticus 11](#) and [Deuteronomy 14](#). In the passage that follows, Barnabas treats these laws as moral lessons only, not as real rules about food. This differs from the rest of the Bible. There the food laws are real commands given to Israel, and the New Testament explains that in Christ they no longer bind believers ([Mark 7:19](#); [Acts 10](#); [Colossians 2:16–17](#)).

10.2 Besides this, he says to them in Deuteronomy: “And I will make a covenant of my requirements with this people.” So God’s command is not about not eating. Rather, Moses spoke in the Spirit.

Translator’s note. No verse of Deuteronomy matches these words exactly. The language resembles passages such as [Deuteronomy 4:1–14](#).

10.3 He mentioned the pig for this reason. He means: do not associate with people who are like pigs. That is, when they are well off, they forget the Lord, but when they are in need, they acknowledge the Lord. In the same way, the pig does not know its master when it is eating, but when it is hungry it squeals, and once it has been fed it is quiet again.

Translator’s note. The Greek uses the same word (kyrios) for “the Lord” and the pig’s “master,” which makes the comparison sharper.

10.4 “Do not eat the eagle, the hawk, the kite, or the raven.” He means: you must not join yourself to or become like people who do not know how to earn their food by toil and sweat. Instead, in their lawlessness they seize what belongs to others. They lie in wait while seeming to walk in innocence, and they look around for

someone to rob because of their greed. In the same way, these birds alone do not provide food for themselves. They sit idle and look for ways to eat the flesh of others, and they are pests in their wickedness.

10.5 “And do not eat the moray, the octopus, or the cuttlefish.” He means: you must not become like such people by joining yourself to them, people who are completely ungodly and already condemned to death. In the same way, these fish alone are cursed and swim in the depths. They do not swim like the others, but live on the ground at the bottom of the sea.

Translator’s note. Leviticus does not name these creatures. Barnabas includes them as examples of water creatures without scales ([Leviticus 11:10-12](#)).

10.6 Moreover, “Do not eat the hare.” Why? He means, you must not become a corrupter of boys, or be like such people. For every year the hare grows another opening for its droppings. It has as many holes as it has lived years.

Translator’s note. The ban on eating the hare is in [Leviticus 11:6](#) and [Deuteronomy 14:7](#). The reason given here comes from ancient animal folklore; Pliny the Elder reports a similar claim. It is not true, and it is not in the Bible.

10.7 Moreover, “Do not eat the hyena.” He means, you must not become an adulterer or a seducer, or be like such people. Why? Because this animal changes its nature every other year, and is sometimes male and sometimes female.

Translator’s note. The hyena is not among the unclean animals in [Leviticus 11](#) or [Deuteronomy 14](#). The belief that it changes sex was ancient folklore; Aristotle already rejected it.

10.8 Moses also rightly hated the weasel. He means, you must not become like those who, we hear, do lawless things with their mouths because of uncleanness. Nor shall you join yourself to unclean women who do lawless things with their mouths. For this animal conceives through its mouth.

Translator’s note. The weasel is listed as unclean in [Leviticus 11:29](#). The idea that it conceives or gives birth through the mouth was ancient animal lore; Aristotle mentions it and rejects it. Barnabas seems to be speaking indirectly of oral sex.

10.9 Moses received three teachings about foods, and so he spoke about them in the Spirit. But they received them as though they were about eating, because of the desire of their flesh.

10.10 David also received knowledge of the same three teachings, and says: “Blessed is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the ungodly,” as the fish go in darkness into the depths. “And has not stood in the way of sinners,” like those who seem to fear the Lord but sin like the pig. “And has not sat in the seat of the

pestilent,” like the birds that sit waiting for prey. Now you have the full teaching about food as well.

Translator’s note. [Psalm 1:1](#). “The pestilent” follows the Greek Old Testament; the Hebrew has “scoffers.”

Scripture: [Psalm 1](#)

10.11 Moses says again: “Eat everything that is cloven-hoofed and chews the cud.” What does he mean? That the person who takes food knows the one who feeds him, and rests on him, and seems to rejoice. He spoke well, looking at the command. So what does he say? Join yourselves to those who fear the Lord, to those who meditate in their heart on the meaning of the word they have received, to those who speak of the Lord’s requirements and keep them, to those who know that meditation is a work of gladness, and who chew over the word of the Lord. And what does “cloven-hoofed” mean? That the righteous person walks in this world and also looks for the holy age to come. See how well Moses gave the Law.

Translator’s note. [Leviticus 11:3](#); [Deuteronomy 14:6](#).

10.12 But how could they have grasped or understood these things? We, however, understand the commands rightly and speak of them as the Lord intended. For this reason he circumcised our ears and hearts, so that we would understand these things.

Translator’s note. The claim that Israel never grasped the true meaning of the Law runs through this letter. Paul does speak of a veil over Israel’s reading ([2 Corinthians 3:14–16](#)). But he also says Israel was entrusted with the oracles of God ([Romans 3:2](#)) and that the Law is holy ([Romans 7:12](#)). He does not treat its literal commands as a misunderstanding.

Chapter 11

11.1 Let us ask whether the Lord took care to foretell the water and the cross. About the water, it is written concerning Israel that they will not accept the baptism that brings forgiveness of sins, but will build for themselves.

Translator’s note. [Jeremiah 2:13](#) is behind this: they dug “broken cisterns” for themselves.

11.2 For the prophet says: “Be astonished, heaven, and let the earth shudder all the more at this, for this people has done two evil things: they abandoned me, the fountain of life, and dug for themselves a pit of death.”

Translator’s note. A loose quotation of [Jeremiah 2:12–13](#). Where Jeremiah has “broken cisterns,” Barnabas has “a pit of death.”

11.3 “Is my holy mountain Sinai a desolate rock? For you will be like the young of a bird, fluttering away with their nest taken from them.”

Translator's note. Based on the Greek of [Isaiah 16:1-2](#), where the mountain is Zion. Barnabas has "Sinai."

11.4 And the prophet says again: "I will go ahead of you and level the mountains, and I will break bronze gates and snap iron bars, and I will give you treasures of darkness, hidden and unseen, so that they may know that I am the Lord God."

Translator's note. [Isaiah 45:2-3](#).

Scripture: [Isaiah 45:2-3](#)

11.5 And: "You will live in a high cave in a strong rock." And: "His water is sure. You will see the king in his glory, and your soul will meditate on the fear of the Lord."

Translator's note. [Isaiah 33:16-18](#).

11.6 And again he says in another prophet: "And the one who does these things will be like a tree planted beside streams of water, which will give its fruit in its season. Its leaf will not fall, and everything he does will prosper."

Translator's note. [Psalm 1:3](#).

11.7 "Not so the ungodly, not so, but like the chaff that the wind blows from the face of the earth. Therefore the ungodly will not stand up in the judgment, nor sinners in the council of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, and the way of the ungodly will perish."

Translator's note. [Psalm 1:4-6](#).

11.8 You see how he marked out the water and the cross together. This is what he means: Blessed are those who hoped in the cross and went down into the water. He speaks of their reward "in its season": at that time, he says, I will repay. As for his saying now, "Its leaves will not fall," he means that every word that comes out of your mouth in faith and love will bring conversion and hope to many.

Translator's note. Barnabas reads the tree beside the water in [Psalm 1](#) as the cross, and the water as baptism. Paul also links baptism with Christ's death ([Romans 6:3-4](#)).

11.9 And another prophet says again: "And the land of Jacob was praised above every land." He means that he glorifies the vessel of his Spirit.

Translator's note. In 7.3 Barnabas calls Christ's body "the vessel of the Spirit," so the "land" here probably means Christ's flesh.

11.10 Then what does he say? "And there was a river flowing on the right, and beautiful trees grew up out of it. Whoever eats from them will live forever."

Translator's note. Based on [Ezekiel 47:1-12](#). Compare [Revelation 22:1-2](#).

| Scripture: [Ezekiel 47:1-12](#)

11.11 He means that we go down into the water full of sins and filth, and come up bearing fear as fruit in our heart and having hope in Jesus in the Spirit. “And whoever eats of these will live forever” means this: whoever hears these things spoken and believes will live forever.

| Scripture: [Ezekiel 47:9](#)

Chapter 12

12.1 In the same way he describes the cross again in another prophet, who says: “And when will these things be completed? says the Lord. When a tree is bent over and stands up, and when blood drips from a tree.” Here again you have the cross, and the one who was going to be crucified.

| *Translator’s note.* This saying is not in our Old Testament, and its exact source is unknown. The words about blood dripping from wood closely resemble 2 Esdras (4 Ezra) 5:5, a Jewish book from around the end of the first century.

12.2 And he speaks again to Moses, when Israel was being attacked by foreigners. He did this to remind them, as they were being attacked, that they had been handed over to death because of their sins. The Spirit speaks to the heart of Moses to make a pattern of the cross and of the one who was going to suffer. Unless they hope in him, he says, they will be attacked forever. So Moses placed one shield on another in the middle of the battle, and standing higher than everyone, he stretched out his hands. In this way Israel again began to win. Then, whenever he lowered them, they began to be killed.

| *Translator’s note.* This is the battle with Amalek in [Exodus 17:8-13](#). There Moses stands on a hilltop holding the staff of God and raises his hands. Exodus does not mention shields. Early Christian writers such as Justin Martyr saw Moses’ outstretched hands as a pattern of the cross.

12.3 Why? So that they would know they cannot be saved unless they hope in him.

12.4 And again in another prophet he says: “All day long I stretched out my hands to a disobedient people who speak against my righteous way.”

| *Translator’s note.* [Isaiah 65:2](#) (quoted also in [Romans 10:21](#)). The Greek Old Testament speaks of a people “who did not walk in a true way”; “my righteous way” is Barnabas’s own adaptation.

12.5 Again Moses makes a pattern of Jesus, showing that he must suffer, and that he himself, whom they will think they have destroyed, will give life. This was shown by a sign while Israel was falling. (The Lord made every kind of serpent bite them, and they were dying, since the transgression came about through the

serpent in Eve.) He did this to convict them that because of their transgression they would be handed over to the affliction of death.

Translator's note. This is the bronze serpent of [Numbers 21:4-9](#), which Jesus himself compared to his being lifted up ([John 3:14](#)).

12.6 Moses himself had commanded: "You shall have no cast or carved image as your god." Yet he makes one himself to show a pattern of Jesus. So Moses makes a bronze serpent and sets it up in a place of honor, and calls the people by a public announcement.

12.7 So they came together and asked Moses to offer a prayer for them for their healing. And Moses said to them: "When any of you is bitten, let him come to the serpent that is set on the tree, and let him hope with faith that, though it is dead, it can give life, and he will be saved at once." And they did so. Here again you have the glory of Jesus, for all things are in him and for him.

Translator's note. The words "all things are in him and for him" echo [Colossians 1:16-17](#) and [Romans 11:36](#). In [Numbers 21](#) the serpent is set on a pole, and the bitten simply look at it. Barnabas says "tree" (wood), the same word used for the cross in [Acts 5:30](#), which makes the connection plainer.

Scripture: [Numbers 21:8-9](#)

12.8 Again, what does Moses say to Jesus the son of Nun, a prophet, when he gives him this name? Why should all the people listen to him alone? Because the Father reveals everything about his Son Jesus.

Translator's note. In Greek, "Joshua" and "Jesus" are the same name (Iēsous). The Greek Old Testament spells Nun as "Naue." [Numbers 13:16](#) says Moses renamed Hoshea "Joshua," and Barnabas sees this as a hint about Jesus.

12.9 So Moses says to Jesus, the son of Nun, giving him this name when he sent him to spy out the land: "Take a book in your hands and write what the Lord says: the Son of God will cut off the whole house of Amalek at the roots in the last days."

Translator's note. Compare [Exodus 17:14](#). There God tells Moses to write down that Amalek will be blotted out and to recite it to Joshua, after the battle with Amalek. Barnabas has Moses tell Joshua to write it when he sends him to spy out the land. The words "Son of God" and "last days" are also Barnabas's own.

12.10 See again Jesus: not a son of man, but the Son of God, revealed in the flesh by a pattern. Since they are going to say that the Christ is David's son, David himself prophesies, fearing and understanding the error of sinners: "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

Translator's note. [Psalm 110:1](#). Jesus uses the same verse in [Mark 12:35-37](#).

Scripture: [Matthew 22:42-49](#)

12.11 And again Isaiah says: “The Lord said to Christ my Lord, whose right hand I took hold of, that nations would obey him, and I will break the strength of kings.” See how David calls him Lord, and does not call him son.

Translator’s note. [Isaiah 45:1](#). In the Greek Old Testament the verse speaks of the Lord’s “anointed” (christos) Cyrus. By a slight change of one word (kyriō, “Lord,” for Kyrō, “Cyrus”), Barnabas makes the verse speak of Christ. The closing remark about David refers back to [Psalm 110](#) in the previous section.

Chapter 13

13.1 Let us see whether this people or the first one is the heir, and whether the covenant is for us or for them.

13.2 Hear what Scripture says about the people: “Isaac prayed for his wife Rebecca, because she was barren, and she conceived. Then Rebecca went out to inquire of the Lord, and the Lord said to her: Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples in your body. One people will be stronger than the other, and the greater will serve the lesser.”

Translator’s note. [Genesis 25:21-23](#); Paul uses the same passage in [Romans 9:10-12](#).

Scripture: [Genesis 25:22-23](#)

13.3 You ought to understand who Isaac is and who Rebecca is, and about whom he has shown that this people is greater than that one.

13.4 And in another prophecy Jacob says more plainly to his son Joseph: “See, the Lord has not deprived me of your face. Bring me your sons, so that I may bless them.”

Translator’s note. [Genesis 48:11](#), 9.

13.5 And he brought Ephraim and Manasseh. He wanted Manasseh to be blessed, because he was the elder, for Joseph brought him to his father Jacob’s right hand. But Jacob saw in the Spirit a pattern of the people to come. And what does it say? “Jacob crossed his hands and put his right hand on the head of Ephraim, the second and younger, and blessed him. And Joseph said to Jacob, ‘Move your right hand to the head of Manasseh, for he is my firstborn son.’ And Jacob said to Joseph, ‘I know, child, I know. But the greater will serve the lesser, and this one will indeed be blessed.’”

Translator’s note. A free retelling of [Genesis 48:13-19](#). The words “the greater will serve the lesser” do not come from [Genesis 48](#). They come from the oracle about Esau and Jacob in [Genesis 25:23](#), which the author quoted at 13.2.

Scripture: [Genesis 48:18-19](#)

13.6 See in whose case he has laid it down that this people is the first and the heir of the covenant.

13.7 If, besides this, it was also spoken of through Abraham, then we have the full measure of our knowledge. So what does he say to Abraham, when he alone believed and was counted righteous?

“See, I have made you, Abraham, the father of the nations who believe in God while uncircumcised.”

Translator’s note. Paul makes a similar point in [Romans 4:9-12](#). Paul also insists that God has not rejected his people Israel ([Romans 11:1-2](#)), a point this author does not make.

Scripture: [Genesis 15:6](#); [Genesis 17:4-5](#)

Chapter 14

14.1 Yes. But let us see whether he has given the covenant he swore to the fathers to give to the people. He has given it. But they were not worthy to receive it, because of their sins.

14.2 For the prophet says: “And Moses was fasting on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights, to receive the Lord’s covenant for the people. And Moses received from the Lord the two tablets, written by the finger of the Lord’s hand in the Spirit. And Moses took them and carried them down to give to the people.”

Translator’s note. A free combination of [Exodus 24:18](#), 31:18 and 34:28 (compare [Deuteronomy 9:9-11](#)). Here “the prophet” is Moses. The words “in the Spirit” are the author’s own addition.

Scripture: [Exodus 24:18](#)

14.3 “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Moses, Moses, go down quickly, for your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have broken the law.’ And Moses understood that they had again made cast idols for themselves, and he threw the tablets from his hands, and the tablets of the Lord’s covenant were broken.”

Translator’s note. Compare [Exodus 32:7-19](#) and [Deuteronomy 9:12-17](#). The author told this same story earlier, at 4.7-8.

Scripture: [Exodus 32:19](#); [Deuteronomy 9:12-17](#)

14.4 Moses received it, but they were not worthy. Now learn how we received it. Moses received it as a servant, but the Lord himself gave it to us, so that we would be the people of the inheritance, by enduring suffering for our sake.

Translator’s note. Calling Moses God’s “servant” (θεράπων) comes from [Numbers 12:7](#). [Hebrews 3:5-6](#) uses the same word to contrast Moses the servant with Christ the Son, though we cannot be sure the author knew Hebrews.

14.5 He appeared so that those people would reach the full measure of their sins, and so that we would receive the covenant

through the Lord Jesus, who inherits it. He was prepared for this very purpose. He would appear and redeem from darkness our hearts, which were already consumed by death and handed over to the lawlessness of error. Then by his word he would make a covenant with us.

14.6 For it is written how the Father commands him to redeem us from darkness and to prepare a holy people for himself.

14.7 So the prophet says: “I, the Lord your God, called you in righteousness, and I will hold your hand and strengthen you. I have given you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out of chains those who are bound, and out of the prison house those who sit in darkness.” So we know where we were redeemed from.

| *Translator’s note.* [Isaiah 42:6-7](#).

| *Scripture:* [Isaiah 49:6-7](#)

14.8 Again the prophet says: “See, I have set you as a light for the nations, so that you may be for salvation to the end of the earth. So says the Lord God who redeemed you.”

| *Translator’s note.* [Isaiah 49:6-7](#).

14.9 And again the prophet says: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to bring good news of grace to the lowly. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to announce the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of repayment, and to comfort all who mourn.”

| *Translator’s note.* [Isaiah 61:1-2](#). Jesus read this passage in the synagogue at Nazareth ([Luke 4:18-19](#)), but he stopped before “the day of repayment,” which this author includes.

Chapter 15

15.1 It is also written about the Sabbath in the Ten Words that he spoke on Mount Sinai face to face to Moses: “Keep the Sabbath of the Lord holy with clean hands and a clean heart.”

| *Translator’s note.* The Ten Commandments in [Exodus 20:8-11](#) and [Deuteronomy 5:12-15](#) do not contain the words “clean hands and a clean heart.” Barnabas likely blends the commandment with [Psalm 24:4](#).

15.2 And in another place he says: “If my sons keep the Sabbath, then I will put my mercy on them.”

| *Translator’s note.* These words are not found in our Old Testament. They loosely resemble the promises attached to Sabbath-keeping in [Jeremiah 17:24-25](#) and [Isaiah 58:13-14](#).

15.3 He speaks of the Sabbath at the beginning of creation: “And God made the works of his hands in six days, and he finished on the

seventh day, and rested on it and made it holy.”

Translator’s note. [Genesis 2:2-3](#).

15.4 Pay attention, children, to what “he finished in six days” means. It means this: the Lord will bring everything to completion in six thousand years, for a day with him means a thousand years. He himself bears witness to me, saying: “See, the day of the Lord will be like a thousand years.” So, children, in six days, that is, in six thousand years, everything will be finished.

Translator’s note. The quoted saying is close to [Psalm 90:4](#) and [2 Peter 3:8](#) but matches neither exactly. Other early writers, such as Irenaeus (Against Heresies 5.28.3), also read the six days of creation as six thousand years of world history.

Scripture: [2 Peter 3:8](#)

15.5 “And he rested on the seventh day.” This means: when his Son comes and puts an end to the time of the lawless one, judges the ungodly, and changes the sun, the moon, and the stars, then he will truly rest on the seventh day.

15.6 Moreover, he says: “You shall make it holy with clean hands and a clean heart.” So if anyone can now make holy the day God made holy, by being clean in heart, then we are mistaken about everything.

15.7 See, then: we will make it holy at that time, when we truly rest. We will be able to do so when we ourselves have been made righteous and have received the promise, when lawlessness is no more and the Lord has made everything new. Then we will be able to make it holy, because we ourselves have first been made holy.

15.8 Moreover, he says to them: “I cannot stand your new moons and Sabbaths.” Do you see what he means? It is not the present Sabbaths that are acceptable to me, but the one that I have made, in which I will give rest to all things and make the beginning of an eighth day, which is the beginning of another world.

Translator’s note. [Isaiah 1:13](#). In Isaiah, God rejects Sabbaths kept by people who practice injustice. Barnabas reads the verse as setting aside the Jewish Sabbath itself in favor of God’s future rest and “eighth day.” That reading is his own and goes beyond what Isaiah says.

15.9 That is why we celebrate the eighth day with joy, the day on which Jesus also rose from the dead, and, after he appeared, went up into heaven.

Translator’s note. Barnabas seems to link the ascension with Sunday as well. In [Acts 1:3](#), Jesus appears to his disciples over forty days before he ascends.

Chapter 16

16.1 I will also tell you about the temple. These wretched people were misled and placed their hope in the building, and not in their God who made them, as if the building were God's house.

Translator's note. The last phrase (ὥς ὄντα οἶκον θεοῦ) can also be read to mean that God himself is the true house of God; the masculine participle ὄντα may refer back to God, so the Greek allows either reading.

16.2 For they enshrined him in the temple almost as the pagans do. But learn how the Lord speaks when he sets it aside: "Who has measured heaven with a span, or the earth with a handful? Was it not I? says the Lord. Heaven is my throne, and the earth is the footstool of my feet. What kind of house will you build for me, or what is the place of my rest?" You know that their hope was in vain.

Translator's note. [Isaiah 40:12](#) and 66:1. Stephen quotes [Isaiah 66:1-2](#) against trust in the temple in [Acts 7:48-50](#).

Scripture: [Isaiah 40:12](#)

16.3 Moreover, he says again: "See, those who tore down this temple will themselves build it."

Translator's note. This appears to be a loose form of [Isaiah 49:17](#) in the Greek Old Testament, which says that Zion "will soon be built by those who tore you down." The Hebrew reads differently. Barnabas applies the verse to the temple.

16.4 That is happening now. Because they went to war, it was torn down by their enemies, and now the very servants of the enemies will rebuild it.

Translator's note. The Romans destroyed the temple in AD 70. This verse is a key clue for dating the letter, but its meaning is disputed. Many scholars connect it with the time of Hadrian, around AD 130, when a Roman temple was planned for the site. Others think of hopes for a Jewish rebuilding early in Hadrian's reign, and some argue for an earlier date.

16.5 Again, it was revealed that the city, the temple, and the people of Israel would be handed over. For Scripture says: "It will happen in the last days that the Lord will hand over the sheep of the pasture, with their fold and their tower, to destruction." And it happened as the Lord said.

Translator's note. No Bible verse matches this quotation. It resembles 1 Enoch 89 (the "Animal Apocalypse"), where the Lord gives his sheep and their tower over to destruction, but the wording is not exact. Barnabas calls it "Scripture," though it is not in the Bible.

16.6 But let us ask whether there is a temple of God. There is, where he himself says he is making and completing it. For it is written: "And it will be that when the week is completed, a temple of God will be built in glory in the name of the Lord."

Translator's note. The source of this quotation is not certain. It may draw on 1 Enoch 91:13, where a house is built "in glory" for the Great King at the end of a "week," or on [Daniel 9:24-27](#), the "seventy weeks."

| Scripture: [Daniel 9:24-27](#)

16.7 So I find that there is a temple. Learn how it will be built in the name of the Lord. Before we believed in God, the dwelling place of our heart was decaying and weak, truly like a temple built by hands, because it was full of idol worship and was a house of demons, since we did all that was against God.

16.8 But it will be built in the name of the Lord. Pay attention, so that the Lord's temple may be built in glory. Learn how. When we received forgiveness of sins and put our hope in the Name, we became new, created again from the beginning. So God truly lives in us, in our dwelling place.

| *Translator's note.* Compare the New Testament teaching that believers are God's temple ([1 Corinthians 3:16](#); [6:19](#); [Ephesians 2:21-22](#)).

16.9 How? By his word of faith, his call of promise, the wisdom of his requirements, the commands of his teaching, he himself prophesying in us, he himself living in us. He opens to us, who were enslaved to death, the door of the temple, that is, the mouth. Giving us repentance, he leads us into the incorruptible temple.

16.10 For the person who longs to be saved looks not to the man but to the one who lives and speaks in him. He is amazed at him, because he has never heard the speaker say such words with his mouth, nor ever wished to hear them. This is a spiritual temple being built for the Lord.

Chapter 17

17.1 As far as I was able to explain things to you clearly and simply, my soul hopes, as I desire, that I have left out nothing that bears on salvation.

17.2 For if I wrote to you about the present or future, you would not understand, because these things are in parables. So much for that.

Chapter 18

18.1 Let us now move on to another kind of knowledge and teaching. There are two ways of teaching and authority, the way of light and the way of darkness. There is a great difference between the two ways. Over one are stationed light-bringing angels of God, and over the other, angels of Satan.

| *Translator's note.* The Two Ways section (chapters 18-20) closely parallels the first part of the Didache (chapters 1-6), which speaks of the ways of life and death. Many scholars think both drew on an older Jewish teaching of the Two Ways. Barnabas's order and wording differ considerably.

18.2 The one is Lord from eternity to eternity, and the other is

ruler of the present time of lawlessness.

Chapter 19

19.1 The way of light is this. If anyone wants to travel the road to the appointed place, let him be diligent in his works. The knowledge given to us for walking in this way is as follows:

19.2 You shall love the one who made you, fear the one who formed you, glorify the one who redeemed you from death. You shall be simple in heart and rich in spirit. You shall not join those who walk in the way of death. You shall hate everything that is not pleasing to God. You shall hate all hypocrisy. You shall not abandon the Lord's commands.

19.3 You shall not exalt yourself, but you shall be humble in every way. You shall not take glory for yourself. You shall not make an evil plan against your neighbor. You shall not let your soul become arrogant.

19.4 You shall not commit sexual immorality, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not corrupt boys. You shall not let the word of God go out from you among any who are unclean. You shall not show favoritism when you correct someone for a wrong. You shall be gentle, you shall be quiet, you shall tremble at the words you have heard. You shall not hold a grudge against your brother.

Translator's note. "Quiet ... tremble at the words" echoes [Isaiah 66:2](#) in the Greek Old Testament, which speaks of the one who is "humble and quiet and trembles at my words."

19.5 You shall not be of two minds about whether it will be or not. You shall not take the Lord's name in vain. You shall love your neighbor more than your own life. You shall not murder a child by abortion, nor kill one that has been born. You shall not take your hand away from your son or your daughter, but from their youth you shall teach them the fear of God.

Translator's note. The wording is plain. The early church condemned abortion and the killing of newborns, including leaving unwanted infants out to die, which was common in the Roman world. The Didache (2.2) has almost the same words.

Scripture: [Deuteronomy 5:11](#)

19.6 You shall not covet what belongs to your neighbor. You shall not be greedy. You shall not join yourself in soul with the proud, but you shall keep company with the humble and righteous. You shall accept the things that happen to you as good, knowing that nothing happens without God.

19.7 You shall not be double-minded or talkative. You shall be subject to your masters as an image of God, with respect and fear. You shall not give orders in bitterness to your male or female slave,

who hope in the same God, in case they stop fearing the God who is over both of you. For he did not come to call people according to their outward standing, but those whom the Spirit prepared.

Translator's note. Compare [Ephesians 6:5-9](#) and [Colossians 3:22-4:1](#), and the very similar wording in the Didache (4.10-11). Slavery was a normal part of the ancient world, and this teaching asks both masters and slaves to answer to the same God.

19.8 You shall share everything with your neighbor and not say that anything is your own. For if you are partners in what is incorruptible, how much more in what is corruptible? You shall not be quick with your tongue, for the mouth is a snare of death. As far as you can, you shall be pure for the sake of your soul.

19.9 Do not be someone who stretches out his hands to take but draws them in to give. You shall love as the apple of your eye everyone who speaks to you the word of the Lord.

Scripture: [Psalm 18](#)

19.10 You shall remember the day of judgment night and day. Every day you shall seek out the company of the saints. You may labor by speaking, going out to encourage others and striving to save a soul by the word. Or you may work with your hands for the ransom of your sins.

Translator's note. The idea that good works and giving can “ransom” sins has roots in the Old Testament and in Jewish teaching ([Daniel 4:27](#); Tobit 12:9); compare Didache 4.6. The New Testament says that Christ’s death is the ransom for sin ([Mark 10:45](#); [1 Peter 1:18-19](#)).

19.11 You shall not hesitate to give, and you shall not grumble when you give. You shall know who is the good payer of the reward. You shall keep what you have received, neither adding to it nor taking away from it. You shall completely hate evil. You shall judge justly.

Translator's note. “Neither adding nor taking away” echoes [Deuteronomy 4:2](#) and 12:32.

19.12 You shall not cause division, but make peace by bringing together those who fight. You shall confess your sins. You shall not come to prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of light.

Chapter 20

20.1 But the way of the Black One is crooked and full of curses. For it is the way of eternal death with punishment, and on it are the things that destroy their souls: idolatry, recklessness, arrogance of power, hypocrisy, double-heartedness, adultery, murder, robbery, pride, transgression, deceit, malice, stubbornness, sorcery, magic, greed, and no fear of God.

Translator's note. “The Black One” is the author’s name for the devil (also

| in 4.9).

20.2 They are persecutors of the good, haters of truth, lovers of lies, not knowing the reward of righteousness, not joining themselves to good or to just judgment. They pay no attention to the widow and orphan. They stay awake not for the fear of God but for evil. Gentleness and patience are far from them. They love empty things, chase after rewards, have no mercy on the poor, and take no trouble for the one who is oppressed. They are quick to slander and do not know their Maker. They murder children and destroy what God has formed. They turn away the needy, crush the afflicted, defend the rich, are unjust judges of the poor, and are sinful in every way.

| *Translator's note.* "What God has formed" most likely refers again to unborn or newborn children, linking back to the ban on abortion in 19.5.

| *Scripture:* [Isaiah 1:23](#)

Chapter 21

21.1 So it is good for anyone who has learned the requirements of the Lord, as many as are written, to walk in them. For the one who does these things will be glorified in the kingdom of God. The one who chooses the others will perish with his works. This is why there is a resurrection. This is why there is repayment.

21.2 I ask those of you who are in high positions, if you will take any advice offered in goodwill: keep among you people to whom you can do good. Do not fail in this.

21.3 The day is near in which everything will perish together with the evil one. The Lord is near, and his reward.

| *Translator's note.* Compare [Isaiah 40:10](#) and [Revelation 22:12](#), where the Lord comes with his reward.

21.4 Again and again I ask you: be good lawgivers for one another, remain faithful advisers to one another, and remove all hypocrisy from among you.

| *Translator's note.* The Greek can mean either "for one another" or "for yourselves."

21.5 And may God, who is Lord of the whole world, give you wisdom, understanding, insight, knowledge of his requirements, and patience.

21.6 Be taught by God, searching for what the Lord is asking of you, and do it, so that you will be found approved on the day of judgment.

| *Translator's note.* The Greek says only "so that you may be found on the day of judgment"; "approved" is added to bring out the implied sense of being found acceptable.

21.7 If there is any memory of good, remember me as you meditate on these things, so that my desire and my watchfulness may come to something good. I ask this of you as a favor.

21.8 While the good vessel is still with you, do not fail one another in anything, but keep seeking these things and fulfill every command, for they are worthwhile.

Translator's note. The "good vessel" most likely means the body, that is, while you are still alive. The phrase is not certain, and some take it differently.

21.9 That is why I was all the more eager to write you what I could, to bring you joy. Farewell, children of love and peace. The Lord of glory and of all grace be with your spirit. The Epistle of Barnabas.

Translator's note. "Farewell" translates a Greek word that literally means "be saved." It was a usual way to close a letter, but here it may also carry its fuller meaning.

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