

Redating the Epistle of Barnabas (thesis outline)

By Ed Stevens - December 2015

Introduction to the Epistle of Barnabas

- The purpose of this thesis and its overall plan (flow of argumentation)
- Manuscript Evidence and the Critical Text of Barnabas
- Modern Views of its Provenance, Authorship, Recipients, and Date (after AD 70)
- Methodology (historical and contextual analysis, with some text and form criticism)
- Introductory historical considerations about Barnabas and his Epistle

I. Exegetical and Contextual Evidence for a Pre-70 Date

- Barn. 2:6 - Sacrifices had already been “abolished” by the OT prophets (not just at AD 70)
- Barn. 4:3-5 - Written before Daniel’s 4th beast destroyed the holy people (before AD 70)
- Barn. 16:1-5 - Refers to the 586 BC destruction, not to the AD 70 destruction as being past, thus allowing this epistle to have been written before AD 70 after all!

II. Barnabean Authorship Supports a Pre-70 Date

- Ancient Traditions about its Barnabean Authorship were unanimous. It was not until the fourth century and the modern critical era that it came into significant question.
- What kind of person was Barnabas, according to the NT statements about him? Statements in this epistle which match the character of the biblical Barnabas.
- Interpolation Theories -- This deals with those statements in the Epistle which are out of character with the historical figure of Barnabas, and discusses the identity of those who might have put these interpolations into the text (Gnostics or Hyper-Allegorists). An additional way to discover the interpolations is to see what parts of this Epistle that Paul corrects in his epistles, as well as what he does not correct. The radical statements that Paul does not seem to be aware of, nor correct, are probably interpolations. This gives us two complementary methods of discerning the interpolations, and helps us determine what the original epistle probably looked like. It removes most of the major arguments against Barnabean authorship that are based on those statements that are out of character with the biblical Barnabas, and thus adds more cumulative support for the Barnabean authorship.

III. Biblical and Historical Evidence Narrows the Date Range to AD 54-56

- Lower Limit (AD 54) - Quotes and Allusions to NT material found in Barnabas, and what this reveals. Tradition says that Matthew gave Barnabas a copy of his gospel to use in his preaching and teaching work. And Barnabas shows a lot of awareness of Matthew’s gospel, as well as Paul’s letters to the Galatians and Thessalonians. Therefore, the Epistle of Barnabas was probably written after Matthew and those letters of Paul (Gal 1Thess 2Thess). Since we date Matthew at AD 31-38 and Galatians-1Thess-2Thess at AD 51-53, it means that this Epistle must have been written after 2Thessalonians (AD 54 or later).
- Upper Limit (AD 60) - Historical Traditions about Barnabas and Mark and how they dovetail nicely with the historical narrative in the book of Acts, in order to pinpoint the death of Barnabas at AD 60, just before Mark showed up in Rome with Paul (AD 61-62).

- Before AD 57 - Paul seems to be aware of the erroneous things taught in the Epistle of Barnabas, and corrects those things in four of his epistles (1Cor, 2Cor, Rom, Heb). These corrections reveal what the original version of Barnabas included and excluded, thus enabling us to identify any interpolations or corruptions that may have been inserted into the text afterwards. And Paul's awareness of this Epistle means that it must have already been in circulation before he wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians in AD 57.
- Date Range (AD 54-56) So the above considerations give us a fairly tight date range for the Epistle (AD 54-56). It fits right between the second and third journeys of Paul, since it shows awareness of Matthew and Paul's earlier epistles, but no awareness of Paul's later epistles, the other General Epistles, or John's Gospel, Epistles and Apocalypse.

Conclusion

- Summary of Argumentation
- Implications of this for the authorship and date of Barnabas
- Appeal to patristic scholars to allow for a pre-70 date