

Barnabas and His Epistle – #2

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Dec. 9, 2012

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Thanks for opening comments, Larry! It is nice to be podcasting here at Covenant Key FM. Thanks, Larry and Jen, for letting me teach on this network.
- B. Why don't we ask God to be with us as we study together here --

Great God of the universe, who alone possesses immortality, dwelling in glory and unapproachable light, high above everything in the heavens and earth and under the earth -- We humble ourselves before You and confess our utter sinfulness and spiritual poverty, and our desperate need for your mercy and grace. Help us in these studies of your first century church to see how they lived sensibly, righteously, and godly (Tit. 2:12) in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15), so that we can apply these truths to our lives in such a way that we not only live godly lives in the godless world around us, but also teach others and build your Kingdom, so that many will be blessed and bring glory and honor to You and Your Son, who redeemed us with His blood. It is in His Glorious and Alone-Worthy Name that we pray. Amen.

- C. Before we get into our review of first century history, I want to talk a little bit about why God has arranged for us to enjoy four more years of the Obama presidency. There is no doubt that God allowed this to happen. The question is "why". It seems clear to me that we Americans are still not awake yet. We have not learned our lesson from the first four years of Obama. We have not really repented. We have not disciplined ourselves to do what is right. We were hoping the politicians would fix the problem, without us having to lift a finger, so we could go back to sleep in our comfortable lifestyles and ignore our spiritual poverty. God clearly has a different idea about how we should live our lives. He is pushing us toward **repentance and learning discipline**. God does not bless worldly, half-hearted, lukewarm, pleasure-seeking, fleshly-oriented, materialistic, self-gratifying, and selfishly-ambitious, spoiled-rotten whiners like us. We are fake Christians. The rest of the world can see through our hypocrisy and spiritual nakedness.

There are no shortcuts to regaining God's blessings on this country. We will have to confess our sins, ask for God's forgiveness, turn back to God in a huge way, and then convert our fellow Americans back to Christianity, and teach our children and grandchildren the ways of righteousness. **It is righteousness that exalts a nation. Sin is a disgrace to any people (Prov. 14:34)**. This nation is no longer a Christian nation. We have failed to study God's Word and know His truth, so that we could faithfully teach our children and grandchildren. As a result we, along with our children and grandchildren have become a godless nation. The highway to God's blessing goes through the valley of **grieving over our sinfulness with deep sincere and life-changing repentance** (Jer. 6:26; 23:10; 31:13; Lam. 3:33; 5:15;

Ezek. 7:16; Ezek. 24:23; Dan. 10:2; Joel 2:12; Amos 6:6; 8:10). It is described in 2 Chron. 7:13-14 -- "humble ourselves and pray and seek His face and turn from our wicked ways..." -- then He will **hear** from heaven, **forgive** our sin, and **heal** our land. We Americans are going to have to come to grips with that, or else be destroyed. There is no alternative, and no escape. We are going through the same cycle of history that the nation Israel went through. God sent the prophets to preach repentance to the people before He brought judgment and destruction. Sometimes they listened and repented, but most of the time they did not repent until after their country was destroyed and they were sent into slavery and captivity in a foreign land. Is that what it is going to take before we repent and turn back to God? Hopefully not! Let each of us determine to "humble ourselves and pray and seek His face and turn from our wicked ways," and God will do the rest.

Sorry for getting on my soapbox here, but all of us need to keep reminding ourselves of these things. I love America, and do not want to see our children and grandchildren have to suffer because of our sins and neglect. One of the reasons we study history like this, is so that we can learn the lessons of the past. We need to know our history so we can avoid making the same mistakes, and instead live righteously and godly in the world around us.

- D. Last time we briefly reviewed some of the major events that were occurring while Paul was in prison in Rome (AD 61-63). We noted that the persecution was heating up at this time, and the earthquakes, famines, and natural disasters were more frequent and intense. James was killed, and John was sent into exile on Patmos at this time. Furthermore, we noted that at least 16 of the 27 New Testament books were written in these four short years from AD 61-64. If we include the book of Acts, it would make 17 of the NT books written at this time. With the persecution heating up, and the apostles either in prison, in exile, or being killed, it is no wonder that the writing activity of the apostles was in high gear. The persecution was destabilizing the churches. Many were falling away. The apostles were writing letters to minimize the damage, and prepare them for the worst (the Neronic persecution) which was about to begin (AD 64). The pressure on the apostles was enormous. They were working feverishly to encourage the saints to persevere and remain alive until the soon-coming Parousia.
- E. Last time we also looked at the Life and Work of Barnabas and Mark. We noted that Barnabas probably wrote his epistle about the time Paul was in prison in Caesarea (AD 58-60). The epistle of Barnabas was very critical of the Jews, and probably provoked the Jews to hunt him down and kill him. We shared some of the traditions about Barnabas, and showed how the biblical data harmonizes well with those traditions, giving us a reasonably good date for the death of Barnabas.
- F. We need to pick up where we left off in our previous discussion. Keep in mind that we are talking about events that occurred at the time Paul was in prison in Rome (AD 61-63). This is just before the Neronic persecution broke out in the summer of AD 64, and not long before the Jewish war with Rome began in AD 66. We are

getting close to the end. Things are heating up, and moving more rapidly toward the climax of the age.

G. According to tradition, when Barnabas was about to be killed by the Jews, he instructed Mark to join forces with Paul after his death. We noticed how the biblical facts seem to validate that tradition. Barnabas and Mark disappeared from the historical narrative in Acts after they left Antioch to do mission work on the island of Cyprus in AD 49-50. Barnabas reappears in Galatians (AD 50-51) and in 1 Corinthians (AD 57). However, Barnabas was eulogized in Acts as if he was already dead by the time Acts was written (AD 60-61). And shortly after that, Paul mentions Mark being with him in Rome during his house-arrest there (AD 62). If that tradition is true, as it seems to be, that would mean that Barnabas died about the time Paul reached Rome, or shortly afterwards (AD 60-61). Mark joined forces with Paul soon after Paul reached Rome, implying that Barnabas had died not long before that.

H. In this session, I want to look a little more closely at the biblical texts which support this chronology for Barnabas and Mark.

The Life and Work of Barnabas and Mark (cont.)

BARNABAS: There are a few mentions of Mark in the later epistles of Paul. It is these biblical statements about Mark which provide the best evidence of when Barnabas might have died.

The book of Acts does not mention either Barnabas or Mark after chapter 15. Both of them disappear together after Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus (Acts 15:39). When Mark does reappear in the epistles of Paul and Peter, it is without any mention of any association with Barnabas (implying that Barnabas was already dead). That supports the tradition which says that just before Barnabas died, he instructed Mark to go to Paul and join with him in his missionary efforts.

Barnabas is mentioned 24 times in Acts, plus four more times in two of Paul's epistles: (1 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 2:1, 9, 13). The three mentions of Barnabas in Galatians was written in about AD 50-51, while 1 Cor. 9:6 was written about six years later (AD 57). The last mention of Barnabas is in the book of Acts. We noticed last time in Acts 11:24, that Luke seems to eulogize Barnabas as if he was already dead by the time Acts was written:

Acts 11:24 [AD 58-62] for **[Barnabas] WAS** a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. [Note the past tense "**WAS** a good man" (not "is a good man"). There is a moral judgment on the life of Barnabas. It would be very difficult to believe that Luke would have said this about Barnabas if he was still alive. This is eulogistic language. Luke evidently wrote the book of Acts after they reached Rome in early AD 61. Luke implies that Barnabas was already dead before he wrote the book of Acts. As we noted last time, Barnabas was still alive when Paul

wrote 1 Corinthians in AD 57. So, somewhere between AD 57 and AD 61, Barnabas must have been killed by the Jews on Cyprus.]

Last time we looked at some **statements about Mark** in two of Paul's prison epistles (Colossians and Philemon) which helped us **pinpoint the date of Barnabas' death** to AD 60-61. From AD 62 onwards, Mark was connected with Paul and Peter, with no mention of Barnabas. The tradition which says that Barnabas died and gave instructions for Mark to join up with Paul, seems to harmonize well with the Biblical narrative in Col. 4:10 and Philemon 24, which we looked at last time. We were dealing with Philemon 24 at the end of our last session. That is where we will pick back up here:

Philem. 24 [AD 63] as do **Mark**, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. *[Note that Mark was still with Paul in Rome when Paul was about to be released. This extended presence of Mark with Paul in Rome would allow for Paul to have written the book of Hebrews in response to the epistle of Barnabas, which Mark had brought with him when he came to Paul in Rome. According to tradition, Barnabas had a copy of Matthew's gospel with him. Did Mark write his gospel before the death of Barnabas, or afterwards?]*

1 Pet. 5:13 [AD 63] She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, **Mark**. *[For some reason Mark left Paul and traveled to Judea to be with Peter. It was probably courier service. Mark could have brought the book of Revelation with him to Paul (or Paul could have already received a copy from the churches in Asia Minor), and then Mark took it to Peter, along with a copy of Hebrews, which Paul had written in response to the Epistle of Barnabas which Mark had furnished to Paul.]*

2 Tim. 4:11 [AD 64] Only Luke is with me. Pick up **Mark** and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. *[Evidently Mark was somewhere close to Ephesus, or in one of the cities which Timothy would have to pass through on his way to see Paul in prison. Paul is most likely using Mark for scribal and courier services. Keeping in mind that Paul had a collection of "books and parchments" which Timothy would have with him when he brought Mark, it seems most likely that Paul intended to place his collection of writings in the care of Timothy and Mark, just like Barnabas had done at his death with Mark.]*

Why do I favor the Pre-70 Date for the Epistle? (AD 57-59)

Since most patristic scholars believe Barnabas died about a decade before AD 70, they reject the idea of Barnabas' authorship of this epistle. We showed last time why they do this. They believe chapter 16 of the Epistle of Barnabas is talking about the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem as a past event. Therefore, they think the book had to be written after AD 70. And since Barnabas died BEFORE AD 70, he would not have been around after AD 70 in order to write this epistle. However, that approach ignores some very important details in the epistle of Barnabas, and apparently it has been ignored by every patristic scholar of the past.

For instance, some destruction of Jerusalem is mentioned in chapter 16 of the Epistle of Barnabas. All futurist patristic scholars think it is referring to AD 70. However, in the context, Barnabas quotes several texts from the Old Testament which are talking about the condition of the Jews at the time of Solomon's temple, before it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. This implies that the past destruction mentioned by Barnabas here in chapter 16 was not AD 70, but rather the 586 BC destruction. This interpretation has been totally missed by all Barnabas scholars.

This is how I am arguing my case for the pre-70 date of Barnabas in my Masters Thesis. I am showing from the context of chapters 13 through 16 that Barnabas is referring to the generation of Isaiah's day who failed to repent, and as a result were destroyed in 586 BC. He is not referring to the AD 70 destruction as a past event. This not only allows us to redate the epistle of Barnabas before AD 70, but it also re-enables the Barnabas authorship of it.

This will be a bombshell in the field of patristic studies. If I am successful in establishing the 586 BC destruction as the one that Barnabas refers to in chapter 16, then the issues of authorship and date for the epistle will have to be reconsidered by patristic scholars in the futurist establishment. Pray for that to happen! We preterists have nothing to lose and everything to gain if this thesis is correct.

I submitted this argument to both Dr. Carleton Paget (Cambridge, England) and Dr. Michael W. Holmes (world-class patristic scholars), and they verified that it is, in fact, a unique approach. As far as they know, no other patristic scholar has taken this approach, and they encouraged me to pursue it and see how far I can go with it. That is exactly what I am doing with my Masters Thesis (entitled, *Redating the Epistle of Barnabas*). When the supervisor for my thesis, Dr. Harris, heard what Paget and Holmes said about this, he instantly gave me the green light on my thesis.

By the way, if any of you would like to have a copy of the *Epistle of Barnabas* in PDF format, so you can read and study along with me, simply email me and request it <preterist1@preterist.org>.

One of the traditions about the death of Barnabas suggests that Mark quickly connected with Paul while he was still at Ephesus on his third missionary journey in AD 57, before Paul went to Jerusalem and was arrested in AD 58. Even though the book of Acts does not mention Paul's connection with Mark in Ephesus, it is certainly possible, and would explain how the bulk of Acts (chapters 1-20, including the Acts 11:24 eulogy) could have been written as early as AD 58-60 while Paul was in prison in Caesarea. However, since the last eight chapters of Acts cover events from AD 58 to 61, it implies

that chapters 21-28 at least (if not the whole book of Acts) were written after Luke and Paul reached Rome in AD 61. Add to that the mention in Colossians of Mark being back in Paul's association (AD 62), and we have a clear endpoint before which time Barnabas must have died in order to be eulogized in Acts 11:24, as well as for Mark to be reunited with Paul.

When we look at all the references to both Barnabas and John Mark in our New Testament, we notice that we hear no more about Mark after he went to Cyprus with Barnabas (AD 50) until about ten years later (AD 61-63) when both Paul and Peter mention him again. According to tradition, Mark stayed connected to Barnabas and worked with him on the island of Cyprus until Barnabas was killed.

Just before his death, tradition says that Barnabas instructed Mark to join up with Paul after his death. Since we see Paul start mentioning Mark again in his prison epistles and post-prison epistles (AD 62-64), that is a good indication that Barnabas was dead, and that Mark had indeed joined up with Paul, just as Barnabas had requested. The reunion was apparent in AD 62, but not before that. So, if we depend exclusively on the biblical evidence, it would appear that Barnabas was killed by the Jews on Cyprus in about AD 60 or 61, shortly before Mark shows up in Rome with Paul.

Evidently Barnabas spent most of his time on Cyprus after he split with Paul in AD 50, with the exception of some brief mission trips to Corinth and other places at some point before his death in AD 60-61. Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, written from Ephesus in AD 57, mentions Barnabas in 1 Cor 9:6 as a traveling missionary still doing evangelistic work, and implies that Barnabas had either visited Corinth or had some point of contact with them. They knew who Barnabas was and how he was currently doing his mission work. And Paul shows no hint of being aware of Barnabas' death at that time (AD 57). The tradition which puts the death of Barnabas in AD 57 simply does not fit the data about Mark not connecting with Paul until AD 61. Surely, if Barnabas died in 57, we would have expected to see Mark show up in the historical narrative of the book of Acts, or in one of Paul's epistles that were written shortly after Barnabas had died (e.g., Romans, which was written in AD 58). If Mark joined with Paul in Ephesus, then surely he would have traveled on to Corinth with Paul, where Paul wrote the book of Romans. Mark would have been mentioned at the end of Romans where Paul refers to everyone that was traveling with him at the time. Mark is not in the list, necessitating the conclusion that Mark had not joined with Paul yet, which also implies that Barnabas had not died yet.

We noticed in our study last time, that Paul's statements about Mark in Col. 4:10 (written in AD 62) imply a *recent reunion with Mark*, and not something that had been in place for over four years (i.e., from AD 57-62). Col. 4:10 implies that Barnabas had died recently (probably within the last year, i.e., AD 61). This means that the eulogy in Acts 11:24 could not have been written back in AD 58-60 before Paul went to Rome.

The date of the book of Acts is therefore related to this whole scenario with Barnabas and Mark. Since Acts eulogizes Barnabas (Acts 11:24), it appears to have been written after Barnabas' death, and since there is no biblical evidence of Mark reuniting with Paul until Paul was in Rome (AD 61), it implies that Acts was not finished until after Paul arrived in Rome and Mark had come to him there. It is this reconciliation between Paul and Mark in AD 61 that fixes the date of Acts at AD 61-62, evidently written in Rome just before Paul's case went to trial in AD 63. If this is the case, then it

implies something about the identity of Theophilus to whom Acts was written. It suggests that Theophilus was a government official in Rome (perhaps Paul's defense attorney) who was interested in Paul's case, and needed to know the full history of Apostle Paul and his connection with Christianity and Judaism.

Barnabas had already written his epistle before his death, and Mark most likely took possession of his books and parchments, and probably brought them with him when he came to Paul in Rome. This means that the epistle of Barnabas was written first, before Paul wrote the book of Hebrews, not the other way around like all patristic scholars have thought in the past. As we will see, this helps explain why the book of Hebrews appears to have so many similarities to the Epistle of Barnabas. Paul probably had the Epistle of Barnabas in front of him as he wrote the book of Hebrews, so that he corrected all of the harsh anti-Judaic rhetoric and overly-allegorical interpretations in Barnabas, before he sent Hebrews to all the same churches who had received the epistle of Barnabas. This means that all the Barnabas scholars who date Barnabas after AD 70, who are trying to find clear quotes or allusions to Hebrews in the epistle of Barnabas, are laboring in vain. They have it just backwards. They should instead be looking for allusions to and corrections of the epistle of Barnabas in the book of Hebrews. We will talk more about the significance of this similarity between Barnabas and Hebrews when we discuss the book of Hebrews which was written by Paul in AD 63 while he was under house-arrest in Rome.

Now you can see why I waited until we reached AD 62 in our studies, before dealing with the *Epistle of Barnabas* and his martyrdom. It has a direct connection with Paul's epistle to the Colossians, where he mentions Mark being with him in Rome.

Before moving on to a discussion of other events, I want to take a quick look at the Epistle of Barnabas itself.

The **Epistle of Barnabas** was evidently written by Barnabas soon after he visited some churches (either Hellenistic Jews or predominantly Gentiles) who were open to considering his strong anti-Jewish and allegorical perspective. We do not know for sure where those churches were. Various scholars have suggested Alexandria in Egypt, Syria, or Turkey. Since Barnabas stayed pretty close to Cyprus most of the time, it is more likely that the churches he visited were nearby in Turkey. The *Epistle of Barnabas* was not a "Judaism-friendly" book, and probably stirred up persecution against him and the other Christians. However, this was not intentional on the part of Barnabas, and was definitely not what Paul was referring to (in AD 62-63 after Barnabas was already dead) when he mentioned some others (probably Judaizers) who were (present tense) proclaiming Christ out of selfish ambition serving only to cause Paul more distress in his imprisonment (Phil. 1:17). Since the Epistle of Barnabas had such a clear anti-Jewish tone to it, it could easily have provoked the Jews on Cyprus to kill him.

They would have regarded Barnabas as guilty of the very thing of which Paul was falsely accused: "teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs" (Acts 21:21). Even though Paul was not guilty of that, the suspicion of it almost got him killed in Jerusalem. This false accusation against Paul could have drawn its support from those who had heard Barnabas teach, or who had read his epistle and assumed that Paul was teaching the same thing as Barnabas. That would be an easy assumption for

them to make, since Paul and Barnabas had worked together for several years at Antioch and on a missionary journey.

The things that Barnabas wrote in this Epistle would certainly have had a provocative effect upon the Jews in Cyprus. This would mean that the epistle could have been written before AD 58 when Paul was arrested. However, it is more likely that it was written not long before Barnabas was killed by the Jews, probably within the range of AD 58-59, allowing enough time for the epistle to provoke the Jews on Cyprus and cause them to kill him in AD 60-61. This would mean that it was written after Paul had been arrested, and might explain some of the extreme anti-Judaistic polemic in Barnabas. No doubt the arrest of Paul would have disturbed his good friend Barnabas, and could have effected the harshness against the Jews that we find in his epistle.

This has been a quick survey of the reasoning I am following to arrive at a date for the death of Barnabas and the date of writing for his epistle. This is a good introduction to some of the research I am doing for my Masters Thesis on *Redating the Epistle of Barnabas*. We will say more about it when we get to AD 63 at the time the book of Hebrews was written.

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If you would like a couple of great books which detail all of these events, I would recommend **ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS** by F. F. Bruce, which is available for order at our website (www.preterist.org), and **JEWISH BACKGROUNDS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT** by J. Julius Scott, which is available from Amazon.com. Be sure to get a copy of my book, **First Century Events**, which deals with the Roman, Jewish, and Christian events of the first century. We will be using it as a study guide here in our studies of the first century. You can purchase it from our website: www.preterist.org

Some further recommended reading:

Josephus *Antiquities* and *Wars* (sections which deal with the Herodian rulers)