**Epistle of Barnabas**

**INTRODUCTION**

***Who is Barnabas?***

Barnabas was one of the earliest Christian leaders. He was a Levite from Cyprus who converted to Christianity very early. He may have been one of the Seventy which Jesus sent out (Luke 10:1-12) or at the very first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2). His birth name was Joseph, but the Apostles called him Barnabas, meaning “son of encouragement.” He first appears in the Scriptures when he sold a field and gave the proceeds to the Apostles to distribute to the poor (Acts 4:36-37).

Barnabas became a leader in the Church after it was scattered by Saul's persecution (Acts 8:1). He seems to have stayed around Jerusalem as an envoy between the Apostles and the scattered congregations. Barnabas brought Paul to the Apostles after his Damascus road experience (Acts 9:27). When Gentiles began to be brought into the Church in Antioch, the Apostles sent Barnabas as their representative. True to his name, he encouraged them to remain true to Christ (Acts 11:19-24). Afterward, he went to Tarsus to find Saul. For a year, Saul and Barnabas taught in Antioch (Acts 11:25-30).

After that year, they were sent out on a missionary journey with John Mark. They began in Barnabas' home territory of Cyprus (Acts 13:4-12). They then went through the provinces of Pamphylia, Galatia, Pisidia and back to Antioch of Syria (Acts 13-14).

After the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), Paul and Barnabas prepared to revisit the congregations they had started. However, Barnabas insisted that John Mark come with them again. Paul refused because John Mark had deserted them on their previous journey (Acts 15:13). After an argument, they split ways. Paul took Silas into Cilicia while Barnabas and John Mark went back to Cyprus (Acts 15:36-41).

According to Church tradition, Barnabas was stoned to death on Cyprus in 62 AD. However, there are very few references to Barnabas outside of the book of Acts. No one is really sure if the accounts of his martyrdom are accurate or not.

***When did Barnabas write this epistle?***

Using 16:3-4 as a basis, the epistle can be dated between 70 (destruction of Jerusalem) and 132 AD (Bar Kochba revolt). Because Barnabas cites no innately New Testament sources, an early date is often preferred. This early date is also preferred by those who seek to resolve the issues with his traditional death date and the contents. However, three possibilities exist:

1. Barnabas wrote the letter before 62 AD, but his disciples didn't publish it right away.
2. Barnabas lived after 62 AD and heard about the Temple's destruction in 70 AD.
3. The reference to the Temple has nothing to do with Jerusalem and everything to do with Jesus. Therefore the passage is immaterial to the epistle's composition date.

I prefer the third option. Much of Barnabas' interpretation of the Old Testament is allegorical. Why not this passage as well? Many of the Early Church Fathers believed that Barnabas was one of the Seventy Jesus sent out in Luke 10. If this is true (and there is no evidence to prove either way), he would likely have heard Jesus refer to His body as the Temple to be raised (John 2:19; Mark 14:58). When this passage talks about tearing down and rebuilding, what if, again, Jesus' body is being referenced. In this case, Jesus' body is the Church. The Jewish leaders forced the Gentile government to put Jesus to death. Who is the Church? Jew and Gentile. They are building up the Temple by evangelizing. Acts and Paul speak about many high-ranking society members becoming Christians through the Apostles.[[1]](#footnote-1) Those who had conspired together to kill Jesus were not followers of the Way of Light.

Also, we can look to the timelessness of this passage. What nailed Jesus to the cross? The sins of every man, woman and child from Adam and Eve until Jesus comes back again on the Last Day. Our sins tore down the Temple of Jesus' physical body. Who is building it back up again? Repentant sinners who feel sorry for the great evil they have caused in the world and to Jesus Himself. Christians of every age can relate to this passage because it is talking about them.

***Who was Barnabas' original audience?***

Most scholars believe that Barnabas wrote his epistle to the congregations on Cyprus at some point after his second missionary journey.

It is most certainly written to Gentile converts who are being taught that the Mosaic Law is still in full effect. Many Jewish teachers broadcast the idea that Gentiles had to become Jewish in order to be accepted as real Christians. This was the topic of discussion at the Council of Jerusalem (50 AD; Acts 15). Paul and Barnabas has dealt with these teachers in Antioch of Syria as well as on their first missionary journey. When they were preparing for their second journey, the Council's message of full acceptance of Gentile Christians was their main priority.

In Barnabas' attempt to help Gentile and Jewish Christians understand how the Mosaic Law fits into their lives, he greatly allegorizes many laws from the Torah. He gives spiritual meanings to many laws that the Jews had made extremely physical and limited. Barnabas sought for his children live by the Spirit of the Law and not be shackled by the letter “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Some use Barnabas' love of allegory and his family relationship to John Mark to place Barnabas in Alexandria when he writes the epistle or as the primary audience. There is no traditional evidence that Barnabas ever left Cyprus after his second missionary journey, but his epistles seemed to receive the widest and earliest acceptance in Alexandria. Clement of Alexandria and Origen appeal to the epistle in the second century.

It appears with the *Teaching* in the Codex Sinaiticus, one of the oldest and best manuscripts of the Bible.

**Chapter 1**

1 Greetings sons and daughters, in the name of our beloved Lord, in peace.

Barnabas greets his unnamed audience as “sons and daughters.” This likely means that it is written to one of the congregations he had planted in his missionary journeys. Disagreements can arise as to whether this was written to a congregation that he and St. Paul established on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:4-14:26) or one of the congregations that he and St. John Mark established on their second missionary journey, after having separated from Paul and Silas after the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:36-41). A third possibility is that this epistle is in the vein of the General (or Catholic) epistles and written to the Church at large.

2 Having God's great and rich ordinances to you, above which also according to superiority I am rejoicing exceedingly over your blessings and glorification in the Spirit; thus inborn is the grace of spiritual gifts you have received. 3 Therefore also I rejoice the more within myself hoping to be saved, that I see truth in you having been poured out from the riches of the Lord's spiritual fountain on you. Your greatly desired appearance has thus filled me with astonishment.

Barnabas uses the word “ordinances” throughout his epistle. These ordinances are not simply the Reformed idea of commandments that govern morality. These ordinances also speak of God's governance over all creation. These ordinances are “great and rich” because they lead to “blessings and glorification in the Spirit” (1:2).

Inborn grace is not the Roman Catholic idea of infused grace. The grace that is inborn in Christians is the spiritual gifts given at Baptism. As a Christian is born again (John 3), these spiritual gifts and God's wonderful grace are born within us.

The spiritual fountain of the Lord's riches is poured out upon all who believe. This fountain imagery runs through the Bible and the Church's hymnody.:

* Psalm 36:9: “For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light do we see light.”
* Proverbs 10:11: “The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.”
* Proverbs 13:14: “The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.”
* Proverbs 14:27: “The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.”
* Proverbs 18:4: “The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook.”
* Jeremiah 2:12-13: “Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”
* Jeremiah 17:13: “O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake You shall be put to shame; those who turn away from You shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water.”

#HYMN EXAMPLES#

4 Therefore being persuaded in this, and being conscious of myself, that I have spoken much among you, I understand that the Lord journeyed with me in the way of righteousness. And I am wholly compelled to this, to love you with my spirit, that great faith and love may dwell among you by faith in His life. 5 Therefore, considering this, that if I may make it my care to share with you a portion from what I received, that it will be to me the same kind of spiritual ministry in your midst, I made haste to send something small to you, in order that by your faith you may have complete knowledge.

Like Paul, Barnabas points to his ministry. He doesn't point to himself, but he points to the God who “journeyed with me in the way of righteousness” (1:4). The way of righteousness comes to the forefront at the end of the epistle, as it does the beginning of the *Teaching*. Walking in the righteous way, we are compelled to love all people. This love for everyone causes faith and love to dwell within us by faith. This love makes us able to share what God has given to us with those around us. God has given us everything we have. It is not ours by nature. We create nothing without His blessing.

Barnabas wanted to quickly give his audience a short message to increase and perfect their knowledge. This knowledge comes through the proclamation of faith. Listening to God's Word, the Holy Spirit completes “the good work” that was begun in Baptism (Philippians 1:6). Barnabas seeks that his listeners continue to increase and perfect their knowledge in the Christian faith by listening to his epistle.

6 Therefore three doctrines are the Lord's: a life of hope, which is the beginning and end of our faith; and righteousness, which is the beginning and end of judgment; and love, which is the witness of righteousness working in exceedingly great joy. 7 For the Master has made known to us through the prophets the things that have passed and the things that are to come, and of what remains give us the firstfruits. When we see the deeds every day, just as it has been spoken, we ought to offer richer and deeper for His fear. 8 But I, not as a teacher, but as one of you, will show a few things, through which you will rejoice in the present.

Barnabas begins his proclamation of the “three doctrines.” As he begins his epistle, he lists the three doctrines that are most important: hope, righteousness, love. As Barnabas speaks about many different moments of God's revelation in the Old Testament, he draws on the “three doctrines” God gave in each revelation.

Hope “is the beginning and end of our faith” (1:6). “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). “These all [the Old Testament saints] died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13).

Righteousness “is the beginning and end of judgment” (1:6). “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:1-2). Therefore Jesus can call Himself “the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last” in His final revelation in Scripture (Revelation 22:13).

Love is “the witness of righteousness working in exceedingly great joy” (1:6). 1 Corinthians 13 speaks of love in great detail. Paul describes love that we cannot truly comprehend. Love that transcends our sinful nature’s understanding of its place in Creation. The beast we can do with love is give it pious lip serve because “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Plunging the depths of love is very rightly considered plunging the depths of God. Man cannot fathom God in His entirety. “Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Love is incomplete in this life. It will only be completed when Jesus returns to take us to Heaven, “when this corruptible [body] has put on incorruption, and this mortal [body] has put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:54). This is the essence of God’s love.

Barnabas approaches his writing of the epistle as a fellow Christian, not as a teacher of the Church or an Apostle. Paul and Barnabas sought their own welfare through their God-given talents and skills. For this reason, Paul and Barnabas had an avenue to appeal to people (1 Corinthians 9:6). These appeals have always sought to bring joy to the congregation and individual Christians.

**Chapter 2**

1 Therefore, seeing that the days are evil and that those who have been energized by it have the authority, we ought to be brought near to ourselves to seek out the Lord's ordinances. 2 Therefore, fear and obedience help our faith, and longsuffering and self-control have allied themselves with us; 3 therefore, those abiding in holiness belong to the Lord: wisdom, understanding, experience, knowledge rejoicing with them.

In these evil days, those in authority seem to be energized by their evil. Two thousand years after these words were written, has anything really changed? Christians must seek out other Christians in order to energize one another in the good which comes from faith in Christ. Energizing in the good comes from that which seems paradoxical: fear, obedience, longsuffering and self-control. Energizing holiness in Christians comes through the evil that so plagues our days (Romans 8:28-30).

The “good” that God brings about through the trials and tribulations shows itself in “wisdom, understanding, experience, knowledge and rejoicing with them” (2:3). These fruits of the Spirit reflect a similarity to St. Paul's admonition in Romans 5:1-5. This process brings about joy because “hope does not put us to shame” (Romans 5:5). We are able to rejoice because we have no shame in Christ.

4 For it has been manifested to us through all the prophets, that He needs neither sacrifices nor holocausts (whole burnt offerings) nor offerings, saying in one place: 5 “What to Me is the riches of your offering?” says the Lord. “I am full of holocausts, and the fat of lambs and the blood of bulls and goats I do not want, nor what you do to be seen by Me. For do I live out of these things from your hands? You shall not be put in My court to eat. If you bring the finest wheat flour, it is idle; incense is an abomination to Me; your new moons and sabbaths I cannot endure.” 6 These things He abolished in order that the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ, without the yoke of obedience, which, not having been made by man He might have the offering.

God requires no sacrifices. All the Prophets pointed to this from Moses onward. While God instituted and commanded the Levitical sacrifices, these were a shadow of the once for all sacrifice to come in Christ Jesus (Hebrews 7:27; 10:10). The “holocaust” was the whole burnt offering prescribed in Leviticus 1. It prescribed the entire animal be consumed. What God had prescribed to be rich in imagery and meaning had become mundane and routine. God's great blessing was covered over by human lack of care and concern. God has been filled up with sacrifices that have no meaning. It has become so bad that God counts these sacrifices **against** those who offer them instead of blessing their offerings. Paul points similarly to those who receive the Lord's Supper unworthily (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). Instead of blessing, God sends judgment on them.

Barnabas quotes Isaiah 1:11-13 as he points toward “the new law of Christ.” All of God’s commandments and ordinances have been given for our good, but we turn them against us through our sins. Our sins taint everything we do. Although God has given these things, He does not take pleasure in them when they are done wrong. Jesus has fulfilled all these things perfectly because we cannot offer them properly. This is “the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

7 And He said again to them, “Did I command your fathers as they were going out of Egypt, to offer me holocausts and offerings? 8 No; but this I commanded them. Each one of you according to the riches in your own heart let him not remember evil, and do not love false oaths.” 9 Therefore we owe to perceive, not being stupid, the good knowledge of our Father, that He said to us, wishing that we should not fall like them, but seek how we may make our offering to Him.

Barnabas quotes Jeremiah 7:21-23, where God commands His people to “walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.” Too often, people get comfortable going through the motions of worship. Isaiah spoke against it after the Northern Kingdom was conquered. Jeremiah spoke against it shortly before Jerusalem was destroyed. Malachi speaks against it while the priests of the rebuilt Temple continue to do the same old thing. All of them would reflect back to David: “The sacrifices of God are a broken heart; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). Here is the proper worship of God “in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Here is the offering God has always commanded of His people.

10 Therefore to us He thus said, “A sacrifice to the Lord is a heart that has been crushed, a sweet smell to the Lord is a heart glorifying the one who had made it.” Therefore we owe, brothers, to be exact concerning our salvation, so that the evil one might not achieve a deceit in us that he might hurl us from our life.

Bringing in Psalm 51, Barnabas encourages us “to be exact concerning our salvation.” Salvation is not something that we leave up to chance. It is not something we should doubt. Therefore we should also not equivocate about it in our speaking to others. We are saved by only one thing: Jesus’ death and resurrection. There is no other foundation you can build upon that will not crumble beneath you. This is what the evil one seeks to do so that “he might hurl us from our life” in Christ.

**Chapter 3**

1 Therefore, concerning these things, He said to them, “Why do you fast for Me?” says the Lord, “so today your voice is heard in crying? I did not give you this fast,” says the Lord, “no man has humbled his soul, 2 nor though you bend your neck like a loop and clothe you in sackcloth and ashes. You shall not call this an acceptable fast.”

God asks if He has commanded the fasting that Christians do. True fasting involves humbling the soul and clothing yourself in the sackcloth of repentance. People often think that the externals are the important thing in fasting. The Pharisees were the greatest example of this viewpoint: “When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may **appear to men** to be fasting” (Matthew 6:16). God doesn't command outward-only fasting. He commanded legitimate fasting (see also *Teaching*, “Excursus on Fasting”).

3 And to us He said, “Behold, this is the fast, which I gave,” says the Lord, “Loose every bond of unrighteousness, set loose the fastenings of harsh agreements, **send** away the bruised in forgiveness and tear up every unrighteous contract. Give your bread to the hungry. If you see a naked man, clothe him. Bring the homeless into your home. If you see a humble man, do not despise him, you nor any of your children. 4 Then your light will break forth as the dawn, and your garments will rise quickly, and righteousness will go before you, and God's glory will surround you.”

True fasting doesn't mean abstaining from food. Fasting includes abstaining from rights that are available (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:6) so that the oppressed might be delivered. Those who truly fast seek to raise those around them so “God's glory will surround you” (3:4).

5 Then you will cry out, and God will hear you, while you are yet speaking He will say, “Behold, here I am.” If you put away from you bondage and violence and word of murmuring, and give your bread to the hungry with a cheerful heart and pity the soul that has been humbled. 6 Therefore, brothers, the long-suffering foresaw the people whom He prepared in His beloved believe in purity, and has manifested to us all things, so that we may not be dashed by converting to their law.

Those who fast properly will have God's blessings on their lives.

**Chapter 4**

1 Therefore it is necessary for us at this moment to investigate and seek out what is able to save us. Let us therefore flee earnestly from all works of lawlessness, lest the works of lawlessness take possession of us. Let us hate the error of the present age, in order that we may love what is to come. 2 Let us not give freedom to our own soul, that it should have authority to gather together with sinners and evil ones, unless we confess like them. 3 The final scandal is near, concerning which it is written, as Enoch said, “For to this the Master has cut short the times and the days, so that His beloved may hasten and come upon the inheritance.” 4 Thus also the prophets said, “Ten kings will rule over the land, and there will arise after them a small king, who will subdue three of the kings under him.” 5 Likewise concerning him, Daniel said, “And I saw the fourth beast, wicked and powerful and more fierce than all the beasts of the sea, and ten horns sprang from him and out of them a little horn, and it subdued under itself three of the great horns.”

“Let us therefore flee earnestly from all works of lawlessness, lest the works of lawlessness take possession of us” (4:1). The idea of “you are what you eat” seems to apply here as well. You aren't a sinner because you sin. You sin because you are a sinner. When you allow sins to remain unconfessed, they will take over your life. They will possess you like the demonic works that they are.

“Let us hate the error of the present time, in order that we may love what is to come” (4:1). St. Paul writes to the Galatians, “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age” (1:3-4). Part of Jesus’ Incarnation was for the deliverance from the power of Satan, “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). Jesus taught not only how to live in this world as His disciple. He also taught that we should wait for the world to come with eager longing (Romans 8:19) and expectation. Hymnwriters have captured this mentality in several well-known and well-loved hymns. “This world is not my home, I’m just a-passin’ through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from Heaven’s open door and I can’t feel at hom in this world any more” (SS ##). Also, “I’m but a stranger here, Heaven is my home; Earth is a desert drear, Heaven is my home” (LSB #748.1). A disciple seeks to live as a member of both realms, the earthly and the heavenly, but we must live in a way that shows our true citizenship is in Heaven (Philippians 3:20).

“Let us not give freedom to our own soul” (4:2). Self-control is extolled as a Christian virtue and fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23; 1 Timothy 2:15; Titus 1:8; 2 Peter 1:6). Not practicing self-control is exactly what Paul says will happen in these last perilous times (2 Timothy 3:1-5). We seek to practice self-control because our sinful nature strives to run roughshod over our lives.

“Unless we confess like them” (4:2). Our sinful nature wants to focus on itself. If we allow ourselves to follow our own desires, we will begin to confess the things of this world which conflict with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our natural default setting is anti-Gospel. We naturally seek the destruction of ourselves and otheres. For proof of this, you only need to think about what the theory of evolution really believes about humanity.

What is “the final scandal” (4:3)? Obviously, this speaks most closely about the End Times. Before the Final Judgment there will be one last great event which will seal the fate of all mankind. Those who follow Christ will be strengthened in their faith. Those who oppose Christ will be strengthened in their unbelief.

From the most cursory reading of Revelation, this “final scandal” will be the Battle of Armageddon. The unclean spirits who came out of the dragon, beast and false prophet (Revelation 16:13) will gather their armies together at Armageddon, the hill of Megiddo, to prepare for one last battle against Christ and His armies (Revelation 16:16). This battle happens after the Millennium. Much has been written about the Millennium and its various interpretations. I will not spend the time here to go into great detail. However, I will point out that the Millennium, throughout much of Church history, has been interpreted as the time of the Church between Jesus’ Ascension into Heaven and His return for the Final Judgment.

At the tail end of this time, Satan will bring forth all his forces for one last stand.

And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from Heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

For whatever reason, God has determined to “loose” Satan for a little while right before Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead. With this loosing and allowance, Satan will attempt to solidify his control over the sinful world. To bring as many people into Hell as he can so his imprisonment and banishment would not be his alone. …**further commentary study – 1 Enoch 89:61-64; 90:17f; 2 Enoch 34:1-3/ Matthew 24:22 / Mark 13:20**

Barnabas mentions Daniel’s fourth beast (Daniel 7:7-8, 23-27). Is this fourth beast the same as the harlot’s beast in Revelation 17?

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| **Daniel 7:7-8**  **7** After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. **8** I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things. | **Revelation 17:3**  And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. |
| **Daniel 7:23-27**  **23** “Thus he said: ‘As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces.24 As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings.25 He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.26 But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end.27 And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.’ | **Revelation 17:12-14**  **12** And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. **13** These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. **14** They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.” |

. . . **further commentary study . . .**

6 Therefore you ought to understand. And yet I ask you this also, as one being from you, and loving you more than my own soul, to devote yourselves now and do not be like those who pile up sins, saying, “Our covenant is also theirs.” 7 It is ours; but these thus lost it forever which had already been received of Moses. For the Scripture says, “And Moses was in the mountain fasting forty days and forty nights, and he received the covenant from the Lord, tablets of stone having been written by the finger of the hand of the Lord.” 8 But by turning to idols they lost it. For thus says the Lord, “Moses, Moses, throw down quickly, because your people have become lawless, whom you have brought up out of Egypt.” And Moses brought together and dashed the two tablets out of his hand; and their covenant was crushed, so that the covenant of Jesus the Beloved might be written on our hearts in peace of His faithfulness.

Barnabas takes on the idea of “once saved, always saved” by pointing out the extreme abuse of the doctrine of justification. There are those who believe in the “practical magic” of Baptism: “I am baptized. I can do whatever I want. My Baptism will cover all my sins no matter what. I'm saved. I cannot lose my salvation.” They will call themselves truer Christians because they are giving Jesus more and more sins to forgive, maximizing their forgiveness. However, Paul says, “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who **died** to sin live any longer in it?” (Romans 6:1-2). We don't receive more grace because we sin more.

Marcion and others throughout Church history have tried to separate the religion of the Old Testament from the religion of Jesus. Barnabas points out our sinful nature always seeks idols to worship. The people of Israel who had seen God's great miracles in Egypt a few months earlier turned to Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as of this Moses, the man who brought us up out of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him” (Exodus 32:1). How easily we turn to something—**anything**--else when God seems distant or we get bored waiting on Him!

Barnabas illustrates the difference between the covenants of Moses and Jesus through the material upon which they are written. The old covenant of the Mosaic Law was written on stone tablets. After Moses dashed the tablets in pieces, God commanded him to carve new tablets to receive the commandments again (Exodus 31:18; 32:15-16; 34:1). Jesus' covenant is written on the heart through the water of Baptism. This is what Jeremiah says, “I will put My laws in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (31:33). Jesus' covenant is written upon the newly-formed heart in Baptism just as the baptized person's name is engraved upon Jesus' nail-scarred hands (Isaiah 49:16).

9 Though I wish to write much, I anxiously write to you, not as a teacher, but as one who loves to leave out nothing of what we have. Therefore let us pay attention in the last days. The whole time of our faithfulness will profit us nothing unless we resist in the lawless time, and against the scandals to come, as it becomes sons of God, in order that the Black One may not have opportunity of entry. 10 Let us flee from all vanity. Let us hate completely the works of the evil way. Not empowering yourselves to live in solitude as already having been made righteous, but assemble yourselves together and rejoice in the common things. 11 For the Scripture says, “Woe to those who are wise for themselves and understanding in their own eyes.” Let us become spiritual. Let us become a temple consecrated to God. As far as it is in us, let us practice the fear of God. Let us contend to keep His commandments, so that we may rejoice in those He has made righteous. 12 The Lord will judge the world without respect of persons. Each one will receive according to his works. If one is good, his righteousness will go before him. If evil, the wages of evil will lead him. 13 Let us never rest as though we were called and slumber in our sins. Then the evil princes would receive authority over us to thrust us out from the Lord's kingdom. 14 But yet consider also this, my brothers. When you see such great signs and wonders wrought in Israel, which are abandoned, let us take heed lest we are found, as it is written, “Many are called, but few are chosen.”

Barnabas encourages his audience to stand against Satan in these last days. Why does Barnabas refer to Satan as “the Black One”? Faithfulness, holiness and salvation are constantly referred to as white in color.

* The priest knew that leprosy was cleansed when the skin turned white (Leviticus 13).
* “Let your garments be always white” (Ecclesiastes 9:8).
* “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isaiah 1:18).
* “As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took His seat; His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool” (Daniel 7:9).
* “Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly” (Daniel 12:10).
* At Jesus’ Transfiguration, His clothes became “white as light” (Matthew 17:2), “intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them” (Mark 9:3).
* The angel at Jesus’ tomb on Easter morning appeared in a white robe (Mark 16:5).
* “To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it” (Revelation 2:17).
* “Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white” (Revelation 3:4).
* The twenty-four elders were clothed in white garments (Revelation 4:4).
* Revelation 6:10-11
* Revelation 7:9-14
* Revelation 14:14
* Revelation 19:11-14
* Revelation 20:11-15

Barnabas’ concern for his audience is the stain of original sin that inhabits all people. Their souls are darkened to one degree or another. They are soiled until they are washed in the blood of the Lamb. Only then are they able to stand firm against the Black One.

As part of his encouragement, he tells them to not go off into solitude but remain in fellowship with the communion of saints. This encouragement serves as a basis for Barnabas' authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Barnabas 4:10 is very similar to Hebrews 10:23-25:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Barnabas 4:10** | **Hebrews 10:23-25** |
| Let us flee from all vanity. Let us hate completely the works of the evil way. Not empowering yourselves to live in solitude as already having been made righteous, but assembles yourselves together and rejoice in the common things. | Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking the assembling together, as is the habit of some but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. |

Barnabas quotes Isaiah 5:21 about being wise in our own eyes. This echoes the sentiments in Proverbs 3:7; 12:15; 26:12; 28:11; etc. Barnabas encourages an increase in spiritual knowledge and wisdom instead of earthly knowledge and wisdom. Through this increase, we are well on our way to being completed and perfected as living stones “built up [as] a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5). This spiritual house is built on the chief cornerstone of the testimony of Jesus as the Son of God (1 Peter 2:6-8; Matthew 16:18).

Part of this cornerstone is the Lord's ordinances. These ordinances include fear of God, rejoicing in righteousness and judgment without respect of persons. As with many places in Scripture, Barnabas reminds us that “each one will receive according to his works” (Barnabas 4:13; Revelation 20:12-13).

“Many are called, but few are chosen” (Barnabas 4:14; Matthew 20:16; 22:14). “Those with [the Lord of lords and King of kings] are called and chosen and faithful” (Revelation 17:14). Those who He considers faithful will never rest nor slumber just as God “will neither slumber nor sleep” as He keeps you (Psalm 121:3-4). The struggle never ends because our sin strives to control us. “Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it” (Genesis 4:7).

**Chapter 5**

1 For this reason the Lord endured to hand over His flesh to destruction, in order that we might be cleansed for the forgiveness of sins, which is sprinkled in His blood.

Jesus willingly handed Himself over to be crucified. He tells Pilate, “You would have no authority over Me at all unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11). Jesus submitted to His Father's will. From His submission we have had our sins forgiven. Barnabas uses the image of His blood being sprinkled on us to remind us of His covenant with Israel through Moses. After Moses read the covenant to the people, he sprinkled them with the blood from the holocaust (Exodus 24:7-8). This sprinkling ratified the covenant between God and Israel just as Baptism ratifies His covenant with us.

Jesus handed over His flesh to destruction so that He might be the one, eternal holocaust for all sins of all time. As the holocaust was completely consumed by fire on the altar, Jesus was completely consumed by God's wrath on the cross. God established the holocaust as the most predominant sacrifice to signify Jesus' sacrifice (Leviticus 1).

2 For it is written concerning Him to Israel and also to us: “He was wounded on account of our lawlessness and has been weakened on account of our sins; on account of His bruises we have been healed; as a lamb is brought to slaughter, and as a sheep is silent before its shearers.” 3 Now therefore we owe to give great thanks to the Lord, because He has made known to us the things of the past, made us wise in the present, and we are not without understanding about the future.

Barnabas goes to Isaiah 53 to talk about Jesus' sacrifice. He is the Lamb of God through whose bruises we are healed. For this wonderful healing, “it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him” (Small Catechism, Apostles' Creed, First Article).

God given us everything we need to know for salvation and He tells us how it was accomplished in the past, how it is applied to us in the present, and what we can expect in the future. The main thing necessary to know about the future was revealed to the Apostles shortly before Jesus was betrayed: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:1-3). Jesus is currently preparing a place in Heaven for each of His brothers and sisters. When that is completed, He will come back to bring everyone to be with Him forever .This is what is most necessary for Christians to know about the future. We need not worry about an exact date. Our knowledge of what is to come gives us the hope to face uncertain days because our salvation is secure in Him.

4 And the Scripture says, “Not unjustly is the net spread out for the birds.” By this He means, “Because a man will be justly destroyed, who having knowledge of the way of righteousness forces himself into the way of darkness.”

Barnabas references Hosea 7:12. Israel (Ephraim) will be destroyed by God's just judgment. “Having knowledge of the way of righteousness,” they strayed from God. Their rebellion causes their destruction.

5 And yet also this, my brothers, “If the Lord endured to suffer for our souls, as the Lord of all the world, to whom God said from the creation of the world: 'Let us make man in Our image and in Our likeness.' How, then, can He endure to suffer from the hands of men?” 6 Understand. The prophets, having received grace from Him, prophesied about Him; and He, in order that He might destroy death and show forth the resurrection of the dead, for that He had to manifest Himself in the flesh, 7 so that He might redeem the promise made to the fathers, and by preparing the new people for Himself might show, while He was on the earth, that by bringing about His resurrection He Himself will judge. 8 Further, He preached, teaching Israel and performing so many wonders and miracles, that He loved them exceedingly.

Adam was created in God's image (Barnabas 5:5; Genesis 1:26). After the Fall, Adam begat children in his own image (Genesis 5:3). From this corrupted stock, God called out for all people of all ages to repent. God endured great suffering and rebellion for a long time before He brought about judgment and destruction 1556 years after Creation (Genesis 5). God promised judgment by the Flood because of man’s sinfulness. Noah preached repentance to the people for a century before God told him to get into the Ark (Genesis 5:32; 7:6). Abraham bargained with God over Sodom and Gomorrah because their “exceedingly grave” sinfulness had come before Him (Genesis 18-19). The Israelites lived in Egypt as slaves for centuries before God sent the plagues (Exodus 1-11). Israel took over the Promised Land “in the fourth generation” after Abraham because “the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete” (Genesis 15:16). God brought a drought for eighteen months through Elijah's word (1 Kings 17-18). God sent prophets to Israel and Judah to warn them of the impending destruction. Many of them did not live to see the destruction happen. Isaiah brings this home to King Hezekiah as he prophesies Babylon's conquest of Judah in later years (Isaiah 39). God withheld prophets for four hundred years between Malachi and John the Baptizer. God endures greatly with man's suffering.

All of this endurance with His people leads to His ultimate endurance on the cross. He destroyed death so that He might show us the resurrection of the dead (Barnabas 5:6). His Passion came after His ministry of preaching, teaching and performing miracles. His ministry of love for sinners who have lost God's most holy image. Love that brought about redemption. Love prompted by the promise given to our forefathers (Luke 1:54-55, 72-73). Love which prompted the promise in the first place (Genesis 3).

9 But when He chose His own apostles to preach His Gospel, He pointed out that He came not to call the righteous but sinners. Since they were above every sin, He manifested Himself in the flesh to be the Son of God. 10 For if He had not come into the flesh, those who saw Him would not be saved, since they cannot look straight at the sun (which is His handiwork), even though it will not remain. 11 For this reason the Son of God came in the flesh, that He might sum up the completion of their sins against those who pursued the death of His prophets. 12 For this reason He endured. For God said of the wounds of His flesh that they came out of them, “When they wound their own shepherds, the sheep of the flock will be destroyed.”

Jesus' choice in the Twelve Apostles and seventy-two disciples to preach His Gospel is one of the great moments of His earthly ministry. Each of these chosen men were sinners. Jesus didn't come into the flesh to call the righteous to Himself. He came to call sinners to repentance and salvation (Luke 5:32). He called sinners to serve Him by proclaiming His salvation. This proclamation of Jesus' death fulfilled the entire history of the prophets and their suffering. These prophets were destroyed by those who had been the religious establishment.

13 He desired thus to suffer; for it was necessary that He suffer on a cross. For the interpreters say about Him, “Spare My soul from the sword”; and, “Destroy My flesh, because the synagogues of evildoers have risen against Me.”

Jesus desired to suffer for sinful man. Jesus proclaimed that a sacrifice was needed for the forgiveness of sins. This was promised all the way back to Adam and Eve through God's words to the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15). Jesus' suffering was only a bruising of His heel. He died, but death could not keep Him in the grave. He is Life itself (John 11:25; 14:6).

Jesus was not a masochist. This is proven by His prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). If there was **any other way** for man's salvation to happen, let it be done that way. But there was no other way. For man to be reconciled with God, God must die for the sin of the world.

14 And again He said, “Behold, I have given My back to those who scourge, and My cheek to those who strike. And I have set My face as a solid rock.”

Jesus gives Himself over so that He might be killed by His own creatures. The Creator submits to the will of His creation. He stood before the world as a lamb is silent before its shearers (Isaiah 53:7). He is determined to see His ministry through to the end. Nothing would stand in His way to the cross. He willingly submits to human judgment because that judgment would serve for the salvation of the world. Satan tried to derail His ministry from the very beginning (Matthew 4:1-11).

Jesus sets His face for Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), and it becomes a hinge for St. Luke's Gospel. The events that occur after that moment are radically different from those before that moment. Jesus set His face “as a solid rock” immediately following the Transfiguration. St. Luke records the topic of Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah on the mountaintop: His exodus, or “departure,” from this world “which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31).

In Jerusalem, Jesus would allow those who had been established by God in their authority to scourge and strike Him (Romans 13:1; Matthew 26:67-68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63-64). Ultimately, He has the authority in the situation (John 19:11). Even though the Sanhedrin believes that they are in control of the events, the silent Jesus is truly showing His authority over them. He allows Himself to be mocked, beaten and ultimately crucified for their sins. Thanks be to God that He wouldn't let anything hinder this work.

**Chapter 6**

1 When, therefore, He made the commandment, what did He say? “Who judges me? Let him stand against me. Who seeks justice from me? Let him come near to the Lord's servant.” 2 Woe to you, because you all have been made as old garments, and a moth will eat you. And again the prophet says, when He was placed as a mighty stone for crushing, “Behold, I will place for Zion's foundation a precious stone—a chosen, honored cornerstone.” 3 Then what does He say? “And he who hopes on Him will live forever.” Is our hope, therefore, on a stone? God forbid. But here the Lord has placed His flesh in strength. For He says, “And He will set Me as a solid rock.” 4 And again the prophet says, “The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner.” And again he says, “This is the great and wonderful day, which the Lord has made.” 5 I write to you in simplicity, so that you may understand; I am the offscouring of your love. 6 What, then, did the prophet say again? “The synagogue of evildoers has surrounded me, they have surrounded me like bees around a honeycomb,” and, “For my clothing they cast lots.”

Barnabas writes very similar to his former coworker Paul: “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies” (Romans 8:33).

God has laid a “chosen, honored cornerstone” in Israel in the person of Jesus (Isaiah 28:16; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20). No other foundation can be laid except that of this cornerstone. No one is able to stand against God's judgment unless he stands upon faith in Jesus.

“The builders rejected” this cornerstone because they want to save themselves (Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42; Mark 14:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7). They will not likely say it in these words, but they want to dictate the terms of their salvation. Among their demands, they want to get rid of Jesus and His crucifixion. The cross is a stumbling block for everyone, churched and unchurched alike (1 Corinthians 1:23). Many devout, life-long Christians prefer the empty cross over the crucifix because they don't want the constant reminder of Jesus' sacrifice. They don't want to be reminded outside of Lent that they are among “the synagogue of evildoers” surrounding Jesus in His death (Psalm 22:16).

Barnabas writes this section “in simplicity” because he wants his audience to understand God's outstanding love through Jesus' death. He brings forth great praise: “This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24). Christians are able to rejoice and be glad every day because every day has been redeemed by Christ the crucified. Our joy comes from His suffering so that we may even rejoice on Good Friday as we solemnly remember His death for our sins.

7 Therefore, when He was about to be manifested and to suffer in His flesh, His suffering was manifested beforehand. For the prophet said concerning Israel, “Woe to their souls, because they have plotted an evil plot against Me, saying, 'Let us bind the Righteous One, because He is unprofitable to us.” 8 What does Moses, the other prophet, say to them? “Behold, thus says the Lord God: 'You have entered the good land, a land flowing with milk and honey, which the Lord promised to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob, and you have received it for an inheritance.'” 9 Learn what knowledge says. Hope in Jesus, who is about to be manifested in the flesh. For a man is earth that suffers; for Adam was created from the face of the earth. 10 What, therefore, does it say? “In the good land, a land flowing with milk and honey.” Blessed be our Lord, brothers, who has placed in us wisdom and understanding of His secret things. For the prophet says a parable of the Lord: “Who will understand, except the wise and learned and him who loves his Lord?”

Jeremiah is the Old Testament prophet upon whom the most evil plots were made. He is the prophet that is still speaking to Judah when Babylon conquered the kingdom. All the horrible things which the invasion and rebellion had brought were laid at Jeremiah's feet. He was the only prophet warning the people of the impending doom (see Jeremiah 28). Because of his negative message, many plots were laid against Jeremiah from “the builders,” the priests at Jerusalem.

Barnabas uses Moses' speech to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land. God had given the land to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. However, “these all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). The generation who had been born during the Wilderness Wandering would live out God's promise. They inherited the “land flowing with milk and honey.”

Those who had suffered in the wilderness would now receive the promise. Everyone suffers because we are all children of Adam. Sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. But this suffering is taken away through Jesus. He suffered for you. He left the ultimate “land flowing with milk and honey” so that He might sojourn and suffer in our wilderness.

11 Therefore, as He renewed us in the remission of sins, He made us to be a new type, having the soul of children, as though He were creating us again. 12 For the Scripture says concerning us, as it says to the Son, “Let us make man according to our image and likeness, and let him rule over the beasts of the earth and the birds of the heavens and the mighty things of the sea.” And the Lord said, seeing our good creation, “Multiply and be fruitful and fill the earth.” These things He said to the Son.

Renewal is one of the most misunderstood parts of the Christian life. People are tempted to think that if we are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) that our whole life should be different after our proper conversion. But renewal through the remission of sins does not take our sinful nature away. Only the resurrection on the Last Day will change that (1 Corinthians 15:42-49).

Renewal is a constant process in the Christian life. Renewal begins at Baptism, where we are brought into the Son. The Son is fruitful, multiplies and fills the earth as He renews people by forgiving their sins. Christian renewal links us with the Son so that we may enjoy His fruitful multiplication.

13 Again I will show you how He says these things to you. In the Last Days He has made a second creation. The Lord says, “Behold, I will make the last as the first.” For this reason, therefore, the prophet proclaimed, “Enter into the land flowing with milk and honey and rule over it.” 14 See then, we have been remodeled, just as again in another prophet it is said, “Behold,” says the Lord, “I will take out these things,” (that is who the Lord's Spirit foresaw), “the hearts of stone and I will put in fleshly [hearts].” Because He was going to be in the flesh to manifest and to dwell with us. 15 For the dwelling-place of our hearts is a holy Temple to the Lord, my brothers. 16 For the Lord says again, “And how will I appear before the Lord my God and will I be glorified?” He says, “I will confess You in the congregation of my brothers, and I will sing to You in the midst of the holy congregation.” Therefore, we are they whom He brought into the good land.

Barnabas applies the preceding words to the Son to all Christians by going through a catalog of Scriptures. He begins with the “second Creation” that is prophesied in the last chapters of Isaiah. It began to be realized in the revelation of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. But its full and final fulfillment will not happen until the Last Day. The Day where all will be equal, as St. Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28. Jesus speaks this way in His Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). Barnabas uses the landowner’s response to the grumbling laborers to show this equality across time. “I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. … So the last will be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:14-16). No matter what age of this world we live in, we will all receive the same eternal reward.

Barnabas then references God’s call of Moses to bring Israel out of Egypt to “enter into the land flowing with milk and honey and rule over it” (6:13; cf. Exodus 3:8). ***… Further commentary study …***

Barnabas then goes from the beginning of Israel’s national history to its end with Ezekiel’s prophecies during the Babylonian exile. Ezekiel speaks of God’s remission of sin as taking out the old heart of stone and replacing it with a new heart of flesh (11:19; 36:26). This is not a conversion of one to the other. This is a spiritual heart transplant surgery. Our stony heart is removed through His forgiveness and Christ’s heart of pure flesh is given to us. This new heart is where the Holy Spirit can truly establish His throne and Temple among us.

Barnabas speaks of this in terms of His impending Incarnation. Ezekiel lived about five centuries before Christ. It is this Incarnation that manifests the reality which He was bringing into the world. A physical type of what will happen on the Last Day.

On Maundy Thursday, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him” (John 13:31). Through His glorification, Jesus testifies to His brothers, the Apostles, in the midst of the great congregation (Psalm 22:22). His confession of Himself as the Paschal Lamb who would die for the sins of the world the next day is the basis of the Christian faith. This is the confession we make as Christians int eh Church and in the world.

17 What, therefore, is the milk and honey? At first, a child eats honey, and drinks milk to live. Therefore we are made alive by faith in the report and by the Word. We will live, ruling over the earth. 18 And we had said above, “And let them increase and multiply and rule over the fish or the birds of the heavens!” For we ought to understand that to rule is the authority, in order that one giving commands may have lordship. 19 If, therefore, this doesn't come to pass now, He has told us the time. At that time, we will be made perfect so we might become heirs of the Lord's covenant.

Barnabas explains the milk and honey in his typical allegorical fashion. Milk and honey have traditionally been some of the first foods eaten by children. They are basic ingredients in many dishes in many cultures. Barnabas points to God’s provision of the most basic necessities in the promises given to His people throughout history (see notes above).

Barnabas ends this chapter with an understanding of Christianity’s “now/not yet” dynamic. God gives His promises in earthly terms, but they will not find their complete and perfect fulfillment until Jesus returns. He has given the promises, but “He has told us the time” of their fulfillment as well. ***… further commentary study …***

**Chapter 7**

1 Cheerful children, know that the good Lord manifested everything to us beforehand. Therefore we should know to whom we ought to give thanks and praise in everything. 2 If the Son of God is Lord, and He is getting ready to judge the living and the dead, we believe that His suffering is life-giving for us. The Son of God cannot suffer except for our sakes. 3 When He was crucified, He was also given vinegar and gall to drink. How does this relate to the priests in the Temple? The commandment is written, “Whoever does not observe the fast shall surely die.” The Lord commands this because He was about to offer His own Person as a sacrifice. The type was established in Isaac, who was offered up on the altar.

Christians have joy and cheer in this life because we have the promises given to us. Everything we need to know has been revealed for us in the Scriptures. Man is conceived and born in sin (Psalm 51:15). Jesus took on sinless human flesh. He died and rose again to save us from our sin. He ascended into Heaven to prepare a place for all who believe in Him (John 14:1-6). He will return to judge the living and the dead.

We also know that this world and life will get much worse as His return comes closer. Barnabas knew that this world was not his home. His true citizenship was in Heaven (Philippians 3:20). Therefore he will take the Scriptures that seem to have a very earthly meaning and present their heavenly meaning. Jesus does this all the time, especially in the Sermon on the Mount.

4 What, then, does He say in the prophet? “And let them eat of the goat that has been offered at the fast for all sins.” Listen carefully: “And let all the priests alone eat the entrails unwashed with vinegar.” 5 For what purpose? Since you are going to give Me, who is giving My flesh for the sins of My new people, gall with vinegar to drink, you will eat alone, while the people fast and mourn in sackcloth and ashes; to show that He must suffer at their hands. 6 Take note of what He has commanded: “Take two goats, fair and alike, and offer them, and let the priest take the one for the holocaust for sins.”

Barnabas places the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) in its proper place as a shadow of Jesus’ crucifixion. He notes the references to eating and fasting that are given for that holy Feast. The Day of Atonement was the most solemn feast God gave Israel. It foreshadows our celebration of Good Friday. In the Old Testament, there was only the promise of atonement through the sacrificial blood being brought before the Ark of the Covenant by the High Priest. In the New Testament, we have the assurance that Jesus’ sacrifice and shed blood **have** atoned for our sins.

The references Barnabas makes to the priest eating the entrails with vinegar is intriguing. A cursory Google search only gives this passage in Barnabas as an example. It seems out of place with the Old Testament because the entrails were typically burned on the altar (Leviticus 1:8-9; 3:4-5; 4:8-10; etc.). There doesn’t seem to be any references in the rabbinic traditions either.

Although we cannot Barnabas’ reference for this practice, he continues his parallels of the crucifixion with the Day of Atonement. Jesus will give His flesh for the forgiveness of sins. The people wore sackcloth and sat in ashes. This comes about when Jesus dies and the Temple curtain is torn in two (Matthew 27:50-51). Those who had been there, even those who had brought Him there, “when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts” (Luke 23:48). The crowds who had been so enthralled in the actions on Good Friday quickly began to mourn their pitiful state.

On the Day of Atonement, two goats were brought forward. From these two, one was chosen to be the holocaust sacrifice (Leviticus 16:5-9). This goat annually represents Jesus’ once for all sacrifice. Because of sinful priests, the Day of Atonement sacrifice had to be repeated annually (Hebrews 5:1-4). Because He had no sin, Jesus was able to fulfill this sacrifice completely. There is no more need to offer a sacrifice for sin. Jesus is the holocaust for sins.

7 And what will they do to the other? He says, “Yet more accursed is this one.” Pay attention to how Jesus is manifested. 8 “Spit on it, everyone, and pierce it through and place the scarlet wool around its head, and let it be cast out into the wilderness.” When this happens, the goat will be carried off into the wilderness, the bearer will take away the wool and will put it on a branch named Rachel. We have become accustomed to eat its shoots where we find them in the country. In this briar alone, the fruits are sweet.

Barnabas now turns to the “other” goat. The goat which is “yet more accursed.” This goat was driven out into the wilderness after the high priest confessed all the people’s sins upon its head (Leviticus 16:20-22). The additional comments of the spitting, scarlet wool and Rachel branch are not found in Leviticus 16. These would be natural signs of contempt for the goat.

***What is the Rachel branch?*** We are not sure, but it seems to have been a thorny bush like the blackberry. It also seems to have been plentiful in Israel. Barnabas describes it as a briar. The wool is placed in this bush to symbolize the One who will be hung upon a tree as a curse for the whole world (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21). In this image, we have a picture of the sweet fruits of salvation delivered.

9 Devote yourselves to what this means: “The one on the altar, and the one yet more accursed.” And moreover the accursed is crowned. Since they will see him in that day wearing the scarlet robe and they will say, “Is this not He, whom we have crowned and set at naught and spat upon Him? Truly this is He, the One who then said He is the Son of God.” 10 For how like the goat? For this reason it says “the goats will be fair and alike,” when they see Him coming, they may be astonished at the likeness of the goat. Therefore behold the type of Jesus that was to suffer. 11 And why did they put the wool in the midst of the thorns? It is a type of Jesus set forth for the Church, because whoever wishes to take away the scarlet wool must suffer many things because the thorns are terrible. He only gains through pain. Thus, He says, “Those who desire Me, and to attain My kingdom, must lay hold of Me through pain and suffering.”

Barnabas further links the scapegoat to Jesus. The scapegoat is accursed by Israel. Once it is driven out of the camp, they wish to never see it again. So also with Jesus. The Jewish leaders stirred the crowd to ask Pilate for a murderous insurrectionist instead of Jesus (Matthew 27:15-23; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:18-25). They traded a man they didn’t want for religious reasons for a man they didn’t want for political reasons. Just as Pilate was worried about a riot (Matthew 27:24), the chief priests had worried about one if Jesus was taken during the Feast (Matthew 26:3-5). Neither wanted a riot, but neither wanted anything to do with the accursed Jesus, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Both goats are types of Jesus. Jesus takes away the sin of the world in both goats, being “fair and alike” as they are. As the sacrificial lamb, Jesus dies for the sin of the world. As the accursed scapegoat, Jesus carries our sins away from us into the real of everlasting death. Jesus fulfills the Day of Atonement as both goats.

“Those who desire Me and attain to My kingdom must lay hold of Me through pain and suffering.” This closely echoes Jesus’ “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). “And whoever does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:38). Pain and suffering come with the cross each Christian must bear.

**Chapter 8**

1 But what do you think the type means? Israel is commanded to bring forth a heifer, whose sin is complete, and slay it and burn it. Then the children take the ashes and put them into vessels and bind the scarlet wool on sticks (behold again the type of the crown and the scarlet wool) and the hyssop. The children sprinkle all the people to purify them from their sins. 2 Observe how plainly he said to you Jesus is the calf. The sinful men offering it are those who brought Him to be slain. Then men will no longer offer. Sinners will no longer have glory. 3 The children sprinkling are those who preach the forgiveness of sins and the purification of heart. They were given the authority to preach the Gospel. (There are twelve because of the twelve tribes of Israel.) 4 Why are there three children sprinkling? They witness to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who are mighty before God. 5 Why was the wool placed on the stick? Because Jesus' kingdom is on the cross. Those who hope in Him will live forever. 6 Why are the wool and the hyssop together? In His kingdom there will be evil days, but we will be saved. He who suffers pain in his flesh is cured through the foulness of the hyssop. 7 For this reason it is manifested plainly to us. It is obscure to them because they do not listen to the Lord's voice.

Barnabas goes on to continue his typological review of Jesus’ crucifixion by visiting Numbers 19. In this chapter, God explains the rite for the ritual of purification from sins. This procedure was done whenever the congregation had sinned, but its most often use was during Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The people and the Tabernacle needed to be cleansed before forgiveness could be assured.

This is the problem with allowing the Law to have a significant portion in our theology. The Law always condemns us because it brings doubt into our lives. The Law demands perfection. We know that we are not perfect. Therefore we seek to be “good enough,” but we are never told where “enough” is. How good do we have to be? How close to perfect do we have to get? These questions bring doubts that drive us further away from God and further within ourselves. Looking within for assurance of salvation is never a good thing!

Barnabas brings us the Gospel focus of the purification rite. The sacrifice is brought forward and provides everything needful for the rite. The heifer is killed and burned. The children serve as the priests of the covenant. The priests simply do as they have been taught. The ashes are gathered into vessels so that they may be used to sprinkle the people. The ashes show the death that must take place for the forgiveness of sins to be obtained.

The scarlet wool is put on a hyssop branch to symbolize Jesus’ crucifixion. Hyssop was used for purification rites throughout the Old Testament. It also finds a place at Jesus’ crucifixion. When Jesus said, “I thirst,” a sponge was dipped in wine, placed on a hyssop branch and put to His lips (John 19:28-29).

Jesus’ crucifixion is spelled out through the symbolism of the purification rite. Jesus told His disciples that “the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and on the third day rise” (Luke 24:7; cf. Matthew 17:22-23; 20:18-19; Mark 9:31; 10:33; Luke 9:44; 18:32-33). The chief priests and elders delivered Jesus over to Pilate for execution (John 18:35; 19:11). They gloried when they handed Him over, but they beat their breasts at His death (Luke 23:48). Their glory was short-lived.

The children are numbered twice. The twelve children represent the Twelve Tribes of Israel and Jesus’ Twelve Apostles. These were given authority to be eyewitnesses of Jesus’ death and resurrection (Acts 1:8, 21-22). But this isn’t a new proclamation. The three children show that this proclamation goes back to the origins of Israel as a people. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were witnesses to the promise given to them by God. Not just an earthly inheritance of land. An eternal inheritance in the Paradise which had been taken away from our first parents. God testifies to this whenever He refers to Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 3:6, 15-16; 4:5; Matthew 22:32; Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37; Acts 3:13; 7:32).

Part of the witnessing in every generation is the evidence of evil in Christ’s kingdom. First, Barnabas grounds Jesus’ kingdom in the cross. The cross itself was evil as it was an instrument to punish the most vile offenders. It brought about the curse of God’s wrath (Galatians 3:10-13). In Jesus’ kingdom on earth, there will always be evil. Hypocrites will sit in church pews. The devil, the world and our sinful flesh will run rampant in the vast majority of the world. No matter how hard we might try to make the world more righteous, we will always fail. Only Jesus can take it away. However, Jesus often promises great rewards to those who persevere this evil age (Revelation 2:7, 10, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21).

This teaching is plain to Christians, but it is most obscure to other religions. Every other religion seeks to rid our lives of evil. None of them have a great place for patiently persevering the trials of this evil age. Most just seek an escape into either another realm in the afterlife or as an improvement to the cosmic energy all around us. Only Christianity seeks to show God’s peace and love in the midst of all the evil around us.

**Chapter 9**

1 He speaks again concerning the ears, how He has circumcised our heart. The Lord says in the prophet, “By the hearing of the ear they obey Me.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Again He says, “Those who are afar off will hear with their ears and know what I have done.”[[3]](#footnote-3) And, “Circumcise your hearts, says the Lord.”[[4]](#footnote-4) 2 And again He says, “Hear, O Israel, thus says the Lord your God.” And again the Spirit of the Lord prophesies, “Who is he who will live forever? Let him hear and obey the voice of My servant.”[[5]](#footnote-5) 3 Again He says, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken these things as a testimony.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Again He says, “Hear the Lord's word, princes of this people.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Again He says, “Hear, O children, the voice crying out in the wilderness.”[[8]](#footnote-8) He circumcised our hearing so that we should hear His Word and believe.

Barnabas goes on a tirade of Scriptural quotations to speak of the circumcision of the heart through the hearing of God’s Word. The footnotes give the references to each of these quotations. He summarizes the entire string in the last sentence: “He circumcised our hearing so that we should hear His Word and believe.

4 Moreover, the circumcision in which they trusted has been abolished. He declared circumcision was not of the flesh. They transgressed because an evil angel misled them. 5 He says to them, “Thus says the Lord your God” (here I find a commandment), 'Do not sow among thorns. Be circumcised to your Lord.'” What does He say? “Circumcise the hardness of your heart, and do not stiffen your neck.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Again, “'Behold,' says the Lord, 'every nation is uncircumcised in the foreskin, but this people is uncircumcised in heart.'” 6 But you will say, “Surely the people were circumcised as a seal.” Yes, but every Syrian and Arab and all the priests of the idols have been circumcised. Are these then also within His covenant? The Egyptians even practice circumcision.

Like Paul, Barnabas points to the circumcision of the flesh as being worthless in God’s sight. “An evil angel misled” the Jews into thinking that this one act was the only important thing to be a member of God’s covenant. The rest of the Law’s commands are secondary to circumcision.

The circumcision of the foreskin was an external sign of the internal circumcision of the heart that God accomplishes through Jesus. The Jews could, and typically did, boast in their circumcision; but they were not the only people to practice it. For a long time in our own country, boys were automatically circumcised immediately after birth unless the family indicated that they were Jewish. It became so routine that it meant nothing any more.

True circumcision—circumcision of the heart—happens when God breaks up the rocky soil of our sin-filled hearts so He can work His mercy and love in us. These two things have been, and always will be, the basis of His covenant with mankind.

7 Learn then, beloved children, concerning all things. For Abraham, who was circumcised first, looked forward in the Spirit to Jesus and received the doctrines of three letters. 8 It says, “Abraham circumcised from his household three hundred eighteen men.” What knowledge was given to him? First, he mentions eighteen and then the three hundred. The eighteen is I (ten) and H (eight). Here you have Jesus. Because the cross in a “T” shape, He said three hundred. He reveals Jesus in two letters and the cross in the third. 9 He who gifted us with His covenant knows. No one has learned a more excellent word from me. I know you are worthy.

In the spirit of allegory, Barnabas brings us back to the first circumcision. Abraham was given the covenant in Genesis 17, and he circumcised himself and 318 men in his household. Barnabas takes the three letters typically used to express that number to reveal the great mystery and power of circumcision.

The Greek letters *iota* and *eta* signify eight and ten respectively. They are also the first two letter in Jesus’ name (). The Greek letter *tau* signifies the number three hundred. *Tau* was also used as a shorthand in carvings to mark Christian meeting places.

Through this analogy, Barnabas properly points us to its core in Jesus’ death. Physical circumcision brought Israelite men into God’s covenant. That covenant has no effect without Jesus’ cross. The Mosaic Law was never intended to be the elaborate rules system for those seeking God’s righteousness. God revealed everything in the Law to point in the opposite direction. Man **cannot** make himself righteous through his own actions. The Levitical sacrificial system illustrates this well. As the hymn says, “Not all the blood of beasts on Jewish altars slain could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain” (LSB #431.1). All the sacrifices point to the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for the forgiveness of all sins.

**Chapter 10**

1 And therefore Moses said, “Do not eat swine, eagle, hawk, raven nor any fish without scales.” He received three doctrines in his understanding. 2 Moreover he speaks to them in Deuteronomy, “I have covenanted My ordinances with this people.” So then God's ordinance is not abstinence from eating, but Moses has spoken in the Spirit.

Let the analogies continue! Barnabas moves from circumcision into the kosher food laws. He goes through several of the unclean animals to provide another instance of a triple doctrinal statement given by God through Moses in these restrictions.

3 Therefore, he mentioned swine. He means: You will not join together with men who are like swine. They forget the Lord when there is plenty, but they recognize the Lord when there is scarcity. The swine does not know its lord when it chews, but it cries out when it is hungry. When it receives food, it is again silent.

In the prohibition of eating pork, Barnabas illustrates the swine’s manner of life. Its only need for a master is when it is hungry. When things are going well, the swine has no care except for enjoying what is right in front of him.

People tend to believe like this very often. Many instances can be cited where there is no care, need or mention of God when there is plenty. In 21st-century America, we are suffering a shortage of godly care and concern because we have made ourselves like Nebuchadnezzar: “Is not this great Babylon, which **I have built** by **my mighty power** as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30) He had no concern for anyone but himself while he prospered as King of Babylon. When God drove him out to live among the wild beasts, all he could do was lift up his eyes to Heaven to plead for his sanity to return (Daniel 4:34). Every person has this tendency within them. Having power or authority tends to inflame it.

4 “Neither eat the eagle, the hawk, the kite nor the raven.” By this he means, never join together nor be like these men. They don't know how to provide food for themselves through toil and sweat. They plunder other people's property in their lawlessness. They lay in wait for it. Though they seem to walk around in innocence, they look around to see who they may plunder in their covetousness. These birds alone gather no food for themselves, but they sit idle and seek out how they may devour others’ flesh. They become the plague of their evil.

These four birds are prohibited in Leviticus 11:13-16. They are merely described by God as “detestable.” What makes them “detestable”? They are birds of prey. “They don’t know how to provide food for themselves.” They eat when they find a corpse to pick at.

As Americans, we don’t see the eagle in this light. We see it as a symbol of freedom. But the word translated “eagle” refers to several species in the vulture family. They are truly birds that prey upon and devour what has already died.

5 He says, “Do not eat the lamprey, the octopus nor the cuttlefish.” He means, never consort with these men or become like them. They are utterly ungodly and have already been condemned to death. These fish are accursed, swimming in the depths. They do not swim like the rest, but they live on the ground at the bottom of the sea.

Barnabas moves onto the seafood portion of the kosher diet found in Leviticus 11:9-12. In these prohibitions, God particularly points out that these aquatic creatures have no fins or scales. As such, they are generally found only on the bottom of the sea. They are truly “bottom feeders.” Barnabas uses their inherent connection to the lowest parts of the sea to denote their general attitude towards Heaven by saying, “They are **utterly** ungodly and have **already** been condemned to death.”

6 He also said, “You may not eat the rabbit.” Why? You shall not corrupt boys, nor become like such people. Because the rabbit annually multiplies the places of its conception. It has as many offspring as it has years of life.

Why pick on the rabbit? Rabbit is delicious. But the rabbit is also promiscuous. Rabbits multiply at a quick rate compared to other animals. We have seen this portrayed many times in cartoons where two rabbits are being chased and duck into a hole or burrow. When the farmer tries to get them out, he is overrun by dozens and hundreds of rabbits. Barnabas warns us against those who jump from one idea to another.

7 Again, “You will not eat the hyena.” He means, never become an adulterer nor a fornicator nor like such people. Why? Because this animal changes its nature every year, becoming at one time male and at another female.

This verse from Barnabas brings a firestorm in our contemporary society because it strikes against transgenderism. Barnabas is not the first to point out this biological fact about the hyena. Aesop had a fable called “The Two Hyenas.” In it, a male hyena attempts an unnatural act with a female hyena. The female replies, “If you do this evil to me by force, you will soon be a victim of the same.”

Anatomically, a female hyena looks so much like a male that it is difficult to tell the difference. Barnabas uses this biological fact to show the prohibition of the depraved sexual society that was prevalent in the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, man has not learned anything from this prohibition except to allow and embrace experimentation in this realm of human life.

8 Moreover, He has rightly hated the weasel. He said, “You shall not become like those of whom we hear as working iniquity with their mouth because of their uncleanness. For this animal conceives by its mouth.”

The prohibition of the weasel is found in Leviticus 11:29. “Weasel” is the primary translation of the Hebrew word.[[10]](#footnote-10) The next most prevalent translation is “mole.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Other options are “mole rat”[[12]](#footnote-12) or simply “rat.”[[13]](#footnote-13) All of these translations have the idea of a burrowing rodent. There is a great deal of folklore that references the conception through the mouth. An appropriate understanding of this idea in Barnabas is to avoid association with braggards. These people “conceive” their uncleanness through the words that come out of their mouths. However, Jesus reminds us that the mouth is not the source of uncleanness: “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person” (Matthew 15:18).

9 Moses received three doctrines concerning meats with spiritual significance, but they received them according to fleshly desire, thinking they referred to only physical eating. 10 David also received knowledge concerning the same three doctrines, saying, “Blessed is man who walks not in ungodly counsel” as fish go in darkness in the deep waters, “and does not stand in the way of sinners” as those who pretend to fear the Lord while sinning like swine, “and does not sit on the scorners’ seat” like the birds who sit and wait for their prey. Take a firm and full grasp of this spiritual knowledge.

Barnabas moves from Moses to David in the “three doctrines” of the kosher food laws. He speaks of the Israelites, including the Jews of his day, understanding them according to the flesh instead of their intended spiritual meanings. David, on the other hand, understood the spiritual sense. He places this understanding and teaching before everyone in the first Psalm:

Blessed is the man  
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
but his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
 and on his law he meditates day and night.

“Blessed is the man who walks not in ungodly counsel.” The ungodly desire to hide their sin in the dark corners of their souls. Most hope that no one exposes them as ungodly. Others celebrate their ungodliness by sharing it publicly and flaunting their sinfulness on full display. Barnabas takes the bottom-feeding seafood in the sense of those who try to hide their sins in the dark recesses. Only those who are willing to dive deep into their lives will find these things.

“And does not stand in the way of sinners.” Swine believe that God is smiling on them when everything is wonderful. Even when they stand with manifest sinners, they “pretend to fear the Lord.” They will wallow in sin’s mud, enjoying themselves, all while claiming to be “ministering” to the sinners around them. St. Paul rebukes the Galatians for the same thing: “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted” (6:1). The spiritual swine use the first part of this verse to justify their actions and behaviors, all the while ignoring the troubles of the second part.

“And does not sit in the scorners’ seat.” Scorn is “open or unqualified contempt.” These are the birds of prey that sit and wait for their prey to be virtually handed to them. Scorn makes one believe that gifts are deserved and that they are entitled to being waited on hand and foor. Scorn has become the new normal in 21st-century American society. We must continue to look to God for all His gifts and not take them for granted or feel that we have deserved or are entitled to any of them.

11 Again Moses said, “You shall eat everything that divides the hoof and chews the cud.” What does he mean? He who receives food knows him who feeds him. Being refreshed, he appears to rejoice in him. He spoke well with regard to the commandment. What does he mean? Join yourselves with those who fear the Lord, who meditate in their heart on the Word, who speak of the Lord's ordinances and keeps them, who know that meditation is a work of gladness, and who “chew the cud” of the Lord's Word. But why the one “that divides the hoof”? The righteous walks both in this world and looks forward to the holy age to come. See what a great lawgiver Moses was! 12 How is it possible for them to understand or comprehend these things? We, rightly understanding His commandments, explain them as the Lord intended. For this reason He has circumcised our hearing and our hearts so we might understand these things.

Barnabas brings out an early Church understanding of the Two Kingdoms/Realms doctrine. As Christians, we are citizens of this material world, but we are also citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven through our Baptism. Barnabas uses God’s command to eat animals that “divides the hoof” as a picture of this basic teaching. This is the internal struggle that every Christian has when they walk each day. We must be knowledgeable of what is going on in the world while we look forward to the world to come. We cannot flee from the material world, as the desert fathers tried. We must use our understanding and desire for the age to come to help us reach out to our physical neighbors who are in need of salvation.

Every Christian is commanded and encouraged to “chew the cud” of God’s Word. Barnabas gives several examples of this chewing, but they are truly based on commandments and instructions in the Scriptures. The earliest of these go all the way back to Moses and the children of Israel in the wilderness:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

The instructions to teach God’s Word implies and expects a personal study. You cannot teach what you do not know. You cannot know unless you are taught and study. This study is the wrestling with the text and its meaning **for** our world today and the world to come. God’s Word is so offensive to our world because it comes to **teach** the world the way of life. The way of Light. Those living comfortably in the world love the darkness (John 3:19). Christians wrestle with the Word because we “divide the hoof” and “chew the cud.”

**Chapter 11**

1 Let us inquire whether the Lord took care to foreshadow the water of Baptism and the cross. Concerning the water, it is written with regard to Israel that they would not receive the Baptism that brings the remission of sins, but they would build another for themselves. 2 For the Prophet says, “Be astonished, O Heaven, and let the earth tremble at this, because this people has committed two great evils: they have forsaken Me, a living fountain, and hewn out for themselves a cistern of death. 3 Is Sinai, My holy mountain, a desert rock? You will be as fledgling birds, fluttering about when they are taken away from their nest.”

Barnabas now leads us into a better understanding of Baptism’s importance. Baptism is “a living fountain” that brings the remission of sins. Baptism shows that salvation is a gift from God. However, Israel would not receive it in faith. Instead, they would seek to “build another for themselves.” This is the default setting of our sinful human nature. If we don’t have an active role in something, if we can’t say that we helped to build it, we do not value it as much.

This building another Baptism is a double evil. First, the action forsakes God. Seeking a new way for salvation tells God that His gift is not good enough. Trying to find life in any place other than God’s gift of Baptism just gives us “a cistern of death.” No other option, not even circumcision, contains the promise of giving life, regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; John 4:14; Revelation 21:6; 22:1, 17). Generally, if something does not give life, it only produces death.

4 Again the Prophet says, “I will go before you and level the mountain and crush the brass gates. I will break the iron bars and give you secret, hidden, invisible treasures. Then they will know that I am the Lord God.”

Barnabas quotes Isaiah 45:2-3. This prophecy is in the midst of YHWH calling Cyrus His anointed. This prophecy reveals the return of Israel from Babylon after its seventy years of exile. Barnabas places this prophecy in the discussion of the water of Baptism because the returning exiles were being brought back into the land, being bought once again as His treasured possession. This does not come from Cyrus the Persian. This comes from the hand of God.

We see the evidence of God’s work through the work of Ezra. The Temple is rebuilt, but that does not save the people. The Jews were saved through God’s grace and mercy as He brings them to Himself, levelling the mountains that seem so imposing, crushing the brass gates and iron bars that bar their path. With all of these obstacles out of the way, believers are now able to receive the “secret, hidden, invisible treasures” of Baptism.

Aside from the water of Baptism, every other treasure is secret, hidden and invisible. Forgiveness of sins is not visible. It is often hidden by our original sin expressing itself in actual sins, It is also hidden because the temporal consequences of our sins may not be taken away. David’s forgiveness of his sins with Bathsheba did not result in the resurrection of Uriah and their firstborn son (2 Samuel 12). Both were still dead. Sin still carries temporal consequences that can be seen. Forgiveness offers the secret and hidden release of the eternal consequences sin brings into our lives.

This is how we know the Lord God. He is a God of forgiveness, mercy and love. The Lenten Verse from the prophet Joel says it well, “Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (2:13).

5 Again, “You will dwell in the lofty cave of a strong rock. His water is sure. You will see the King in His glory. Your soul will meditate on the fear of the Lord.”

In this image, taken from Isaiah 33:16-17, multiple applications may be seen. First, we find Moses on Mount Sinai. After God commands Moses to take the children of Israel away from the holy mountain (Exodus 33:1-6), Moses requests to see God’s glory (Exodus 33:18). Since God had talked to Moses “as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11), Moses wanted to see God as He truly is. However, God says, “You cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live. … There is a place by Me where you shall stand on the rock, and while My glory passes by I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with My hand until I have passed by” (Exodus 33:20-22). Moses is hidden—he dwells—in the lofty cave of the strong rock of God’s grace and mercy.

Second, as He brings it to us, comes in the rock being a symbol of the Church. The images of a rock being related to the Church are numerous. Typically, the rock forms the foundation of the Church. But what about the Church’s relationship to the individual Christian? The Church is a “house of living stones” (1 Peter 2:5). Each stone is set in its proper place upon the foundation of Christ. This foundation is so secure that “the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Thus, the Christian has the security of being able to be hidden and dwell in a lofty cave of the strong rock of the Church.

As Barnabas moves again to Baptism, “His water is sure.” One can base the hope of his salvation upon his Baptism. Not that Baptism is a magical rite or produces a talisman against evil. Baptism’s power and hope come from God’s Word being combined with the water to produce salvation. God is the active agent in Baptism. Because He has commanded it, every Christian can take refuge in his/her Baptism in the time of temptation or as a basis for repentance from which forgiveness may be sought.

What does this repentance allow? “You will see the King in His glory.” You will see God as He is because He will take your sin away. There will be no barrier between you and God. St. Paul says this so well, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Once we come into Heaven, the one eternal “lofty cave of a strong rock,” there will be no unanswered questions. There will be no more concerns or cares. Then, “your soul will meditate on the fear of the Lord” perfectly and gratefully. This will become your very existence, as it is encouraged throughout Scripture.

6 Again He says in another prophet, “He who does these things will be like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season. Its leaf does not fade. He prospers in whatever he does. 7 Not so with the wicked. They are like chaff, which the wind drives away from the face of the earth. Therefore the wicked will not stand in judgment, nor sinners in the counsel of the righteous. The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” 8 Note how He described the water and the cross together. He means this: Blessed are they who hope on the cross and have descended into the water. For He speaks of the reward “in His season”; at that time, He says, “I will repay.” But now when He says, “Their leaves will not fade,” He means that every word which comes from your mouth in faith and love will be for the conversion and hope of many.

Barnabas now goes to one of the most basic images of the blessed life of salvation: a tree. He quotes from Psalm 1 and references Revelation 22. Both images relate back to the Creation. God created man to live in a garden surrounded by trees. Trees planted by streams of living water (Genesis 2).

The Garden of Eden has always been a scene of comfort and security. It’s the background image behind the hymn “In the Garden.” The comfort and security of being blessed by God gives us hope in this desolate wasteland of sin. The Garden of Eden was Paradise. As Christians, we are awaiting Paradise. Jesus promised this to the repentant thief on the cross (Luke 23:43) and to the congregation in Ephesus if they conquered against those who opposed their faith (Revelation 2:7).

As Barnabas finishes his application of these passages, he parallels Isaiah 55:10-11: “For as the rain and the snow come down form Heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” He focuses on every word spoken by a Christian in faith and love. These words are the basis for his name. Barnabas means “son of encouragement.” Faithful and loving words desire to bring Christian blessing and comfort to all who hear them. How sad it is that our world receives these words as burdens!

9 Again, another Prophet says, “The land of Jacob was praised above every land.” He means that He is glorifying the vessel of His Spirit. 10 What does He say next? “There was a river flowing on the right hand. Beautiful trees grew out of it. Whoever eats of them will live forever.” 11 He means to say that we go down into the water full of sins and defiled. We come up bearing fruit in our hearts, having fear and hope in Jesus in the Spirit. “And whoever eats of them will live forever.” He means that whoever hears and believes these things will live forever.

The first quotation has no direct correlation to any singular Bible passage. It is most closely related to Ezekiel 20:6, which is paralleled in verse 15:

On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, **the most glorious of all lands.**

There are several parallel passages through the Old Testament which brings out Israel’s place as God’s treasured possession (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Malachi 3:17).

* Psalm 89:27; Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1; Psalm 48:1-2; 50:2; 102:16ff.; 125:1; Isaiah 14:32; 28:16; 30:19; 33:5, 20; 46:13; 51:3; Zechariah 8:2-3; cf. Romans 11:26; Hebrews 12:22

The second passage is based off Ezekiel 47:1-12. This is one of my favorite passages to preach on for Good Friday. It provides a wonderful picture of Jesus’ salvation throughout history. The river flows from the altar and grows deeper the further out it flows. Trees grow out of the banks, showing the great provision God gives to us. It is also reminiscent of Revelation 22:2, where the tree of life’s leaves are “for the healing of the nations.”

Barnabas’ analogy of Baptism illustrates the God-given nature of the Sacrament. We come to Baptism fully defiled by our sin. We come away from Baptism with the ability to bear fruits of righteousness. Through these fruits, brought about by the Holy Spirit, we are assured of everlasting life. This life is first given to us at Baptism, but it continues through the growth process of life in this fallen world. The fruits we bear in the trials and tribulations of this life yield the blessings of the world to come.

**Chapter 12**

1 Likewise, He describes the cross in another prophet, saying, “'When will all these things be accomplished?' says the Lord. 'When blood shall flow from the tree.'” Here again you have reference to the cross and to Him who was to be crucified.

Barnabas switches from Baptism to the source of Baptism’s saving power: Jesus’ blood shed on the cross. The quotation comes out of 2 Esdras 4:33 and 5:5, out of the Apocrypha. It has a parallel in Job 14:7: “For there is hope in a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots shall not cease.” Job’s “hope in a tree” can only come through the Son of God’s crucifixion.

2 He said again in Moses, when Israel was attacked by foreigners, and so that He might remind them who were being attacked that they were delivered to death because of their sins. The Spirit speaks to Moses that he make a representation of the cross, and of Him who would suffer. He says, unless they put their trust in Him, they will be attacked forever. Therefore, Moses piled one shield upon another in the midst of the battle. Standing on higher ground, he stretched out his hands. As long as he did so, Israel was victorious. When he let them drop, they began to perish. 3 Why? So that they might know that they cannot be saved without hope in Him.

Barnabas combines two stories from Moses’ books: the battle against the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-13) and the bronze serpent (Numbers 21:4-9). From the battle against Amalek, Israel’s first taste of warfare, Barnabas brings out Moses’ outstretched hands that blessed Israel with victory. From the bronze serpent, Moses was commanded to make the bronze serpent to look like the fiery serpents attacking the people. In both stories, two things are the same: the cause and the resolution. Both events are caused by Israel’s sin. The battle with Amalek comes immediately after the testing at Massah and Meribah (Exodus 17:1-7). The fiery serpents came upon the people because they complained about their lack of food and water (Numbers 21:5).

Both stories resolve through faith in God. Israel’s hope in battle comes from Moses being able to keep his arms outstretched. It wasn’t Joshua’s battle prowess because it was his first battle. The people who were bitten by the fiery serpents could only be healed by looking at the bronze serpent in faith. Salvation could not come by any way other than faith in God.

4 Again He says in the Prophet, “I stretched out My hands all day long to a disobedient people that refused My righteous way.” 5 Again Moses made a representation of Jesus, showing that He must suffer. That He will give His life. They believed that they had destroyed Him. But He gives life through the sign He gave Israel when they were smitten. The Lord sent every kind of serpent to bite them. They perished to demonstrate that Eve's Fall took place through a serpent. He sought to convince them that they would be delivered over to the affliction of death because of their transgression.

Barnabas moves to Isaiah 65:2 in order to show the crucifixion from a slightly different angle. On the cross, Jesus’ arms are outstretched by rebellious people who should have listened to Him. He takes on the look of the bronze serpent so that the atonement might be seen in a similar light to the punishment. Sin’s punishment is death (Romans 6:23). Jesus dies to atone for sin, as all the Levitical sacrifices had foreshadowed. His death conquered the death we deserve. Moses’ type of the bronze serpent shows this example greatly.

The image of the serpent runs through the Bible as a personification of evil. This springs from Eve’s fall into sin through the serpent’s question (Genesis 3:1). Just as Jesus took on human flesh to save humanity, He became the serpent of sin suspended on the cross.

6 Moreover, Moses commanded them, “You shall not make a carved or molten image for your God,” yet he makes one himself to show them a type of Jesus. Therefore, Moses makes a molten serpent and places it in honor and calls the people by a proclamation. 7 So they came together and pleaded for Moses to intercede for their healing. But Moses said to them, “Whenever one of you is bitten, let him come to the serpent placed on the tree. Let him believe and hope in faith that the dead serpent is able to give life and he will be saved.” They did so. Again you have the glory of Jesus, for all things are in Him and for Him.

Barnabas points out the irony of Numbers 21 and the Incarnation. The First Commandment forbids us from making a graven image. God commands Moses to break this very commandment. How is this possible? Because God was going to do this Himself. God takes on human flesh. Jesus of Nazareth is not carved or molten. He is flesh and blood. All the images of Jesus in the Scriptures, including the bronze serpent, proclaim God’s mercy through Him.

*“The dead serpent is able to give life.”* Only Jesus is able to give life by His death. By death, He conquered death. Those who believe in His death and resurrection for their salvation will be saved. We no longer have a bronze serpent to look toward for our healing. What do we have? We have Jesus dying on the cross. Our churches are filled with crosses. Hopefully our churches have at least one crucifix in it. Not just the bare metal or wooden cross but Jesus on the cross. This is where we see His glory. This is what we worship and celebrate. A God who has died to give us everlasting life.

8 Again, consider what Moses says, as a prophet, to Joshua son of Nun, when he gives him that name. He says all the people should listen to him alone because the Father was revealing everything in His Son Jesus. 9 When he sent him to spy out the land, Moses said to Joshua son of Nun, “Take a book in your hands and write what the Lord says: the Son of God will tear up the roots of Amalek’s whole house on the Last Day.”

When Moses picked out the twelve spies to go into the land of Canaan, one of them was Hoshea son of Nun. Before the spies left, Moses changed Hoshea’s name to Joshua (Numbers 13:1-16). This name change is slight, if you only look at spelling, but it has a major confessional angle to it. Hoshea comes from the Hebrew word meaning “salvation.” The spelling shift to Joshua gives us “The LORD is salvation.”

Moses knew that Hoshea would one day lead Israel in his stead. He didn’t want there to be any confusion as to the source of Israel’s salvation and success. It would not come from this young man. Salvation only comes from the Lord. Joshua would become a great leader. He was respected by the people, but he was not their Savior.

He simply wore their Savior’s name. Joshua is Jesus’ name in Hebrew. Jesus of Nazareth was being prophesied and confessed in the almost throwaway line in Numbers 13. Even the simplest of historical statements can have a profound meaning in Scripture. We can’t go overboard with it, but we can’t ignore it either when it’s right in front of us. In Numbers 13:16, we are not overreaching to link Joshua son of Nun to Jesus the Son of God.

In verse 9, Barnabas conflates a couple of narratives. He combines Moses’ renaming of Hoshea to Joshua with Joshua’s first battled as Israel’s general. At the end of the battle, God tells Moses to write this prophecy about Amalek’s complete destruction (Exodus 17:14). All of this will happen on the Last Day. Every enemy of God will be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:25-26). Amalek is simply one of these enemies.

10 Again, do not see Jesus as a son of man but as the Son of God. He was revealed in a type and in the flesh. Since men will say that Christ is David’s son, David, fearing and understanding the sinners’ error, prophesies, “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.’” 11 Isaiah also says, “The LORD said to Christ my Lord, ‘I have laid hold of His right hand, that the nations should obey Him. I will break the strength of kings.’” Notice that David calls Him Lord and not Son.

Barnabas takes Psalm 110 and Jesus’ discussion in Mark 12 to show that David believed that his promised Son and heir was his Lord. He looked forward to God’s promise of an eternal throne because he believed this promised heir would be the LORD Himself. He believed the same as our first mother Eve, who hoped that she had received his promise in Cain (Genesis 4:1). Both focused on God’s promise more than physical relationship.

The citation from Isaiah is not attested in Scripture. However, it holds Psalm 110 in its proper meaning.

**Chapter 13**

1 Is this people the heir or the former? Is the covenant for us or for them? 2 Hear what the Scripture says concerning the people: “Isaac prayed concerning Rebekah his wife, because she was barren, and she conceived. Then Rebekah went to inquire of the Lord. The Lord said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples in your belly. One people will overcome the other, and the older will serve the younger.'”

Looking at Genesis 25:21-23, we see the difference between people. Isaac and Rebekah brought forth two peoples. Both Israel and Edom have their beginning from this couple. A couple who had struggled with barrenness.

God’s people often spring forth in the midst, and in spite of, barrenness. Abram and Sarai were barren until **well past** the age of childbearing before Isaac was born (Genesis 11:30; 21:3). Isaac and Rebekah were barren before Isaac’s prayer (Genesis 25:21-23). Rachel was barren (Genesis 29:31) until God heard her cries to give her Joseph (Genesis 30:22-24). Hannah was barren before her prayer for Samuel (1 Samuel 1-2). Zechariah and Elizabeth were barren and “advanced in years” before the John the Baptizer was born (Luke 1:7). All of these couples—and many more—battled barrenness. These are some of those whose prayers God answered by giving them a child and relieving their barrenness. The multitude of those whom God answers differently are still among His people, but He has called them to other vocations.

3 You ought to understand who is Isaac and who is Rebekah, and in whose case He has shown that this people is greater than that people.

In this narrative, Isaac is a type of Christ while Rebekah is a type of the Church. Just as the twins battled in Rebekah’s womb, the orthodox constantly battle against false teaching. The orthodox will prevail over the false teachers. Not because of their might, knowledge or argument. Because the LORD will bring the orthodox forth as His children. He will separate them from the false teachers like wheat from chaff (Matthew 3:12; Luke 3:17) or as sheep from goats (Matthew 25:31-46).

4 In another prophecy Jacob speaks more plainly to his son Joseph, “Behold the Lord has not deprived me of your presence. Bring your sons that I may bless them.” 5 He brought Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph wished Manasseh to be blessed because he was the oldest. Joseph brought him up to Jacob's right hand. But Jacob saw in his spirit a type of the people and the future. What does he say? “Jacob crossed his hands and placed his right hand on Ephraim's head, the second and younger son, and blessed him. Joseph said to Jacob, 'Change your right hand onto the head of Manasseh, my firstborn.' And Jacob said to Joseph, 'I know it, my child, I know it; but the greater will serve the less, and this one will indeed be blessed.'” 6 See in whose cases He ordained that this people should be first and the heir of the covenant. 7 If then besides this He also remembered it also in Abraham's case, we reach the perfection of our knowledge. What then does He say to Abraham, when he alone was faithful, and it was counted to him as righteousness? “Behold, I have made you, Abraham, the father of the nations who believe in God while uncircumcised.”

When Jacob is dying, he continues the tradition of his ancestors of blessing his children (Genesis 27). Throughout Genesis 48-49, Jacob prophesies over and blesses the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Barnabas focuses on the blessing of Manasseh and Ephraim, where he gives the greater blessing (his right hand) to Joseph’s younger son Ephraim instead of his firstborn Manasseh. This is reminiscent of his own blessing over his older brother Esau, despite his own shenanigans to obtain that blessing for himself. This is another of the moments where God forgoes the firstborn to bring about His plan of salvation through a younger son: Seth over Cain (Genesis 4:25-5:5); Isaac over Ishamel (Genesis 15-21); Jacob over Esau (Genesis 27); Ephraim over Manasseh (Genesis 48); Judah over Reuben (Genesis 49:3-12); Moses over Aaron (Exodus 6:20); Perez over Zerah (Genesis 38:27-30; Matthew 1:3); David over his brothers (1 Samuel 16); Solomon over his brothers (2 Samuel 13-1 Kings 2); etc.

All of these distinctions and exceptions to the norm only perfect our knowledge of God’s covenant with Abraham. When God called Abram from Haran, He promised, “In you all the tribes of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). When He changes his name to Abraham, He says, “I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you” (Genesis 17:5-6). All of these promises are given **before** Abraham is circumcised (Genesis 17:23-27; Romans 4:11). These promises are not given because of an external, physical ritual. These promises are given because of faith. Faith given to Abram in the original promises.

**Chapter 14**

1 Yes, but did He really give the covenant He swore to the father to the people? He has given it, but they were unworthy to receive it because of their sins. 2 The prophet says, “Moses fasted on Mount Sinai forty days and forty nights so he might receive the Lord’s covenant for the people. Moses received the two tablets from the Lord, which were written by the Lord’s finger in the Spirit.” Moses took them and brought them down to the people. 3 The Lord said to Moses, “Moses, Moses, go down quickly! Your people, whom you brought out of Egypt, have become lawless.” When Moses saw that they had made a molten image for themselves, he cast the tablets out of his hand. The tablets of the Lord’s covenant were broken.

From ancient times, God has promised a covenant with His people. The genealogies throughout the book of Genesis channel this covenant until we get to the one person who becomes the “father of many nations” (Genesis 17:5). Everything springs from this covenant.

Did God give this covenant, confirmed to Abraham in Genesis 15, to the people of Israel? Did Abraham’s physical descendants through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob receive the promise? Yes, God gave it to them, but their sins made them unworthy of receiving it.

Moses was on top of Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights, receiving the covenant from God. This time period repeats itself throughout the Scriptures as times of judgment:

* God sent rain upon the earth, destroying all life on land, because “every intention of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).
* Moses fasted on Mount Sinai for the people so that he might receive the covenant (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9).
* Jesus fasted in the Wilderness to prepare Him to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:2).

Moses’ fasting was interrupted by the people’s sin with the Golden Calf (Genesis 32). Barnabas points out God’s displeasure that the Holy Spirit brings out in the text. “**Your** people, whom **you** brought out of Egypt, have become lawless.” When Israel got to Mount Sinai, God called them His people. Now, they belonged to Moses. He wanted nothing to do with them and their idolatrous hearts. Moses emphasized God’s displeasure by casting the stone tablets to the ground.

4 Moses received it, but they were unworthy. But how did we receive it? Moses received it as a servant, but the Lord gave it to us, as the people of the inheritance, by suffering for our sakes. 5 He was manifested that they should fill up the measure of their sins. Being made heirs by Him, we received the covenant of the Lord Jesus. For this reason He was prepared, so that when He appeared, He might redeem our hearts from darkness. They were already handed over to death and the iniquity of error. Thus He established the covenant by His blood. 6 For it is written that the Father commanded Him to ransom us out of darkness and prepare a holy people for Himself.

What is the difference between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church? Faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection to ransom and redeem us from our sins. Old Testament Israel was unworthy because they would not believe. The measure of their sins had not been filled yet. Their sin kept them away from fully taking over the Promised Land. Their sin lead them to split into two kingdoms. Their sin sent them into exile.

But their sin also sent their Savior. Jesus came from their own bloodline in order to save them, but they would not believe God’s promises to them. All of His promises centered around one people being made holy in His Son. St. John wrote, “He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:11-12).

The Church has become His holy people because we have believed on Jesus’ name. We are God’s children through Jesus’ redemption. Being redeemed, we have now inherited the covenant, having become worthy only through His blood.

7 Therefore the prophet says, “I the Lord your God called you in righteousness. I will hold your hand and strengthen you. I will give you for a covenant to the people, for a light to the Gentiles, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out of prison those who are bound, and those sitting in darkness out of the guardhouse.” Therefore we know how we have been ransomed.

How have we been ransomed? “The true Light, which gives light to everyone” (John 1:9), has come into the world. Isaiah prophesied that He was coming (42:6-7). When John the Baptizer sent his disciples to inquire about Jesus, He responded with this passage as proof that He is the Messiah (Matthew 11:1-6). We have been ransomed because we know that the Light has come into the world.

8 Again the prophet says, “Behold, I have made you a light to the Gentiles, to be for salvation until the ends of the earth, thus says the Lord God, your Redeemer.”

Jesus was not sent to the Jews only. He was also sent to the Gentiles. “For God so loved **the world**,” the Gospel of John says (3:16). John later reveals in His Gospel, “I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one Shepherd” (10:16). Jesus did not come to bring salvation to only one nation of people. He came so the vision of Revelation might be fulfilled: “Behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands” (7:9). Jesus “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the Truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

9 And again the prophet says, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the Gospel of grace to the poor. He sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom to prisoners and sight to the blind, to call the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of recompense, to comfort all who mourn.”

The Spirit of the Lord has come into the world to “proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD and the day of recompense” (Isaiah 61:1-2). Jesus embodied this passage as He read it in His hometown’s synagogue. “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). His Incarnation was the beginning of the “acceptable day of the Lord.” It continued to escalate and expand through His ministry. It will reach its climax when He returns to judge the living and the dead.

**Chapter 15**

1 Furthermore it is also written concerning the Sabbath in the Decalog which He spoke on Mount Sinai face-to-face with Moses. “Sanctify the Lord's Sabbath with clean hands and a clean heart.” 2 And elsewhere He says, “If My sons keep the Sabbath, then I will place My mercy on them.”

Barnabas switches from the future rest of the saved to its current state in the Sabbath. He starts with the Third Commandment about keeping the Sabbath holy. Barnabas focuses the attention immediately to the state of mind that is common even now among Jews: “If My sons keep the Sabbath, then I will place My mercy on them” (cf. Isaiah 56:1-8). Many modern Jews believe that the Messiah will not come until all Jews keep **just one** Sabbath perfectly.

3 He speaks of the Sabbath at the beginning of Creation: “In six days God made the works of His hands, and on the seventh day He made an end, and rested in it and sanctified it.” 4 Children, notice what is the meaning of “He made an end in six days”? He means this: In six thousand years the Lord will make an end of everything. For a day with Him means a thousand years. And He Himself is my witness, saying, “Behold, the day of the Lord is as a thousand years.” Therefore, children, in six days, in six thousand years, He will make an end to everything. 5 “And He rested on the seventh day.” This means, when His Son comes, He will destroy the time of the wicked one, and will judge the ungodly, and will change the sun and the moon and the stars, and then He will truly rest on the seventh day.

Barnabas goes into a common Jewish millennialism. Taking the Creation account’s definition of the Sabbath, he links in David’s words in Psalm 90: “For a thousand years in Your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.” There has been the idea in Jewish thought that Creation is a type of all of human history. That god will allow six thousand years of human history to happen before the Messiah comes and brings the promised rest.

The problem with this idea is a problem of dating. Most conservative commentators will put Creation around 4000 BC. With this date, we have already passed the six thousand year mark. Jesus did not come back in 2000 AD. The other dating issues becomes a theological issue. Jews don’t believe that the Messiah has come yet. There are many ideas among them which bring about a millennial reign of the Messiah over the whole world. Unfortunately, this has become popular in many Evangelical Christian circles as well.

While Revelation reveals that Jesus will destroy the Wicked One in the eternal fire of Hell (20:10), it never says that Jesus’ millennial reign will be a political reign. Instead, Scripture speaks of Him reigning from His throne in Heaven even now.

6 Furthermore, He says, “Sanctify it with clean hands and a clean heart.” Even if a man is pure in heart, we are altogether deceived if we think he can sanctify the day God sanctified now. 7 We will indeed sanctify it at that time, while we enjoy true rest. We will be able to do so because we have been made righteous and have received the promise. There will be no more sin, but the Lord will make everything new. We will be able to sanctify it because we ourselves have been sanctified first. 8 Furthermore He says to them, “I cannot stand your new moons and Sabbaths.” What does He mean? The present Sabbaths are not acceptable to Me. What I have made is the beginning of another world in which I will give rest to everything. I will make the beginning of the eighth day. 8 Therefore we also celebrate the eighth day with gladness on it. Jesus rose from the dead, manifested Himself and ascended into Heaven.

The eighth day is a unique doctrine of Christianity. It has roots in Jewish circumcision, but there is not much made about the eighth day in Jewish literature outside this ritual.

A Hebrew boy was brought into God’s covenant with Abraham through circumcision on the eighth day of life (Genesis 17:10-14). Christianity, from very early on, brought out the eighth day as a picture of a new creation. This doctrine is based firmly on the celebration of Holy Week. Palm Sunday is the first day of Holy Week. Easter is the eighth day. Jesus’ resurrection marks the beginning of the new creation. What had happened throughout Holy Week resemble God’s creation of Heaven and earth. On the sixth day of Creation, God formed Adam out of the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7). On the sixth day of Holy Week, the Son of God in human flesh died on the cross for the sins of the world. Rest occurred on the seventh day. New operations began with the first day of the next week, the eighth day of history. God’s creative work was done. Now, His preserving work began as man began to tend the Garden.

We celebrate the eighth day with great joy because salvation was assured for us on that day. The eighth day of Holy Week presents the everlasting life that comes through the new covenant in Christ’s death and resurrection. Easter joy is ours because we believe in the new heavens and new earth coming for us to enjoy for eternity.

**Chapter 16**

1 I will also speak with you concerning the Temple as being God’s house, how these wretched men were led astray when they placed their hope in the building and not upon their God who made them. 2 For almost like the Gentiles they consecrated Him in the Temple. But learn what the Lord says while abolishing the Temple? “'Who has measured the heavens with a span, or the land with his outstretched hand? Have I not?' says the Lord. 'Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool, what house will you build for Me, or what is My place of rest?'” You know that their hope was vain.

The Temple is God’s house. No one denies that. However, God’s house is not one particular building. No physical structure can contain God. Barnabas strengthens this from the last chapter of Isaiah. We can look back to David’s desire to build a Temple for God: “In all the places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?’” (2 Samuel 7:7) No command was ever given.

Barnabas also points to Isaiah 40 that Heaven is God’s throne. The earth, as great as it seems to us, is His footstool. Everything that He has created is as nothing before Him. How, then, can our works and deeds stack up before Him? Only through His blessing and mercy. Without these, everything is vain.

3 Furthermore He says again, “Behold, those who have destroyed this Temple will build it themselves.” 4 It is happening now. For because they went to war their enemy destroyed it. Even now the enemy's servants will build it up again.

The destruction of the Temple was a great sticking point against Jesus in the Sanhedrin’s mock trial on Maundy Thursday. Several came forward with His words from John 2:19: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it.” They destroyed the Temple of His body, but He raised it again on the third day.

This reference to the destruction of the Temple, especially since “it is happening now,” cause many to date this epistle around 70 AD. However, I would point back to Barnabas’ ministry for understanding his interpretation of Isaiah 49:17. Who was Barnabas’ first partner in ministry? Paul. The great missionary who had “persecuted the Chruch of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it” (Galatians 1:13). Paul and Barnabas went through the southern part of modern Turkey, establishing congregations in each city. Raising presbyters in each place to guide the congregations after they left. He also had tried to destroy the Temple of God’s house was called to build it up.

5 Again, it was manifested that the city and the Temple and the people of Israel were to handed over. The Scripture says, “And it will come to pass in the last days that the Lord will deliver the sheep of His pasture, and the fold, and their tower to destruction.” And it came to pass just as the Lord spoke.

God’s people sin. God forgives. However, there does come a time when God hands people over to their sins. The Northern Kingdom was handed over to Assyria (2 Kings 17). The Southern Kingdom was handed over to Babylon (2 Kings 25). The hardhearted refuse to see the proof of God’s Word even when it’s right in front of them (Romans 1:24-25). Hymenaeus and Alexander, who had once professed faith in Christ, were “delivered to Satan” by Paul because of their blasphemy (1 Timothy 1:18-20). It doesn’t matter how faithful you were once. I you are not faithful unto death, you will not receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

6 Is there a Temple of God? Yes! It exists where He Himself makes and perfects it. For it is written, “And it will come to pass, when the week is completed, that God’s Temple will be built gloriously in His name.” 7 Therefore there is a Temple. It will be built in the Lord’s name. Before we believed in God, our heart’s habitation was corrupt and weak, like a temple built with hands. It was filled with idolatry. It was a demonic house, doing things that are contrary to God.

Every Christian is a Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16). He dwells within us through Baptism. He creates and sustains the faith which is the foundation, walls and ceiling. The Holy Spirit perfects the human soul day by day, taking it from a demonic house filled with idolatry to a holy house where we worship the Father in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24). We go from “every intention of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5) to being prompted by “groanings too deep for words” to praise God (Romans 8:26).

8 “But it will be built in the Lord's name.” Give heed in order that the Lord's Temple may be built gloriously. How? Learn. When we received the forgiveness of sins, and placed our hope on the Name, we became new, being created again from the beginning; therefore God truly dwells in our habitation. 9 How? His Word of faith, the calling of His promise, the wisdom of the ordinances, the commandments of the teaching, Himself prophesying in us, Himself dwelling in us, by opening the door of the Temple (that is the mouth) to us, giving repentance to us, and thus He leads us, who have been enslaved to death into the incorruptible Temple. 10 For he who desires to be saved looks not at the man, but at Him who dwells and speaks in him, and is amazed at Him, for He has never at any time heard these words out of the speaker's mouth, nor himself desired to hear them. This is the spiritual temple built to the Lord.

St. Peter says, “As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:4-5). We are being built into a spiritual house for the Holy Spirit to dwell as His Temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). The transformation that happens in this building is amazing because the Holy Spirit enlightens us with His gifts, giving us words to speak that we might not otherwise consider (Mark 13:11). Many times, some of the most profound thoughts in Christian devotion have been promptings of the Holy Spirit without much thought given by the writer. This isn’t on the same level as the inspiration of Scripture, but it does show the Holy Spirit at work in Christians.

**Chapter 17**

1 As far as possibility and simplicity allow, my soul hopes that nothing necessary for salvation has been omitted. 2 For if I write to you concerning things present or things to come, you will not understand because they are hidden in parables. These things are so.

Barnabas sought to keep his epistle as simple as possible. He wanted the primary message to be clear for his “sons and daughters” (1:1). This chapter marks the turning point in the epistle from a general exposition of things necessary for salvation into an exposition of the Two Ways doctrine, which is also presented in the *Teaching*.

**Chapter 18**

1 Now let us pass over onto another lesson and teaching. There are two ways of teaching and power, one of Light and one of Darkness. And there is a great difference in the two Ways. For over one there is set God's light-bearing angels, but over the other Satan's angels. 2 And the one is the Lord's from eternity and to eternity, but the other is the ruler of the present time of lawlessness.

The major difference between Barnabas and the *Teaching* is the terminology used. The *Teaching* speaks of the ways of life and death. Barnabas speaks of light and darkness. Barnabas also presents it in a more spiritual way in his introduction. He speaks of God’s light-bearing angels over against Satan’s demons. He also compares the length of each way: light is eternal while darkness is only in “the present time of lawlessness.” As he goes into chapters 19-21, he follows the *Teaching*’s lead in taking his spiritual introduction and making it more concrete.

**Chapter 19**

1 This is the way of light: if one desires to journey to his appointed place, let him be zealous in his works. The knowledge is given to us so that we may walk in it as follows: 2 Love your Maker. Fear your Creator. Glorify Him who redeemed you from death. Be simple in heart and rich in spirit. Don't cleave to those who walk in the way of death. Hate everything not God-pleasing. Hate all hypocrisy. Never forsake the Lord's commandments.

Barnabas begins his description of the way of light in a similar fashion to the greatest commandment: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). This is shown through the encouragement to love, fear and glorify. The reason for this fear and love comes through God’s work in your life as Maker, Creator and Redeemer.

The way of light has nothing to do with the way of darkness and death. Light seeks to be pleasing to God without hypocrisy. With this in mind, a Christian walking in the way of light meditates on God’s commandments (Psalm 119:15, 27, 78), because God’s Word “is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

3 Do not exalt yourself but be humble-minded in everything. Do not take glory for yourself. Do not form an evil plan against your neighbor. Do not give your soul to presumption.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). Meekness illustrates the lack, or even disdain, of self-exaltation. Humility seeks no glory but seeks to give glory to Him who deserves it. Neither of these God-pleasing virtues has any room for presumption. Presumption supposes that you know everything you need to know, but no one knows everything.

4 Do not fornicate. Do not commit adultery. Do not commit sodomy.

Sexual sins are quite prominent in our time, but it isn’t a new thing. Sexual sins have been going on for as long as man has been fallen. They only seem more prominent today because they are publicly glorified. St. Paul tells us, “Flee sexual immorality. Every other sin one commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18).

In three short sentences, Barnabas covers all the major categories of sexual sin. Fornication includes sex before marriage as well as pornography. Adultery involves sex with someone other than your spouse while married. Sodomy covers homosexuality.

Never let God's Word leave you in any kind of uncleanness. Do not respect persons when rebuking transgression.

As he speaks about uncleanness, Barnabas also speaks against picking and choosing which sins you rebuke and which you sweep under the rug. By our own sinful nature, we especially enjoy rebuking even the slightest offense of those we dislike. We will also cover and make excuses for those closest to us. People complain about both because we know by nature that every sin **should** be rebuked and handled fairly and equally across the board. Our justice system is set up that way so that everyone **should** get the same treatment.

Be meek, quiet, and fearful of the words you have heard. Do not bear malice against your brother.

Again, Barnabas exhorts meekness and quietness in our lives. St. Paul gives similar encouragement to St. Timothy:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10). The way of light is grounded in God’s Word. This Word bears no malice against anyone. “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). “He is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, ‘I will tell of Your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise’” (Hebrews 2:11-12; cf. Psalm 22:22). If Jesus is willing to call them brothers, why should we bear nay malice toward anyone?

5 Never be double-minded, whether it will be or not.

The way of light has no room for double-mindedness. Faith isn’t an either-or. It’s a both-and. Jesus did not become incarnate to create confusion. He came to make sinners sure of free salvation available through His life, death and resurrection. There is no “maybe” with faith. Jesus has come to make everything certain.

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?  He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?  Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.  Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.  Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?  As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;  
    we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,  neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31-39)

“Do not take the Lord's name in vain.” Love your neighbor more than your own soul.

The Second Commandment is brought forth because we have a definite way to properly use God’s name. We use it to “call upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks” (Small Catechism). God gave us His name so we will use it. It isn’t a treasure to be hidden away.

Barnabas links the second great commandment with the Second Commandment. Using the Lord’s name properly includes putting your neighbor and his needs before your own. St. Paul tells the Philippians, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others as more significant than yourselves” (2:3). He then goes into the mind of Christ “who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (2:6).

Do not murder children by abortion, nor again kill them when they are born. Never withhold your hand from your son or from your daughter, but from their youth teach them the fear of the Lord.

Abortion is not a novel invention of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision. In fact, that only legalized the procedure which had been outlawed in most modern societies for many years. Although there is no definitive, written evidence to support it, I’m sure there have been abortions of one kind or another for as long as there have been unwanted pregnancies. There are always reasons for not wanting a child: career, age (too young or too old), health (mother or baby), abuse, rape, etc. However valid the reason may be, Barnabas still calls abortion “murder.”

But he doesn’t stop with condemning abortions of unborn children. He also condemns killing them after they are born. Before the advent of ultrasound technology, no one knew the gender or the health of the baby until he or she was born. Throughout history, there have been communities built for “defective” people. Places where they could be sent so that they did not “embarrass” their family because of their defect. This was very common for children born with Down syndrome. This was almost as bad a practice as killing them outright. They were alive, but they knew that they were unwanted and unloved.

Instead, parents are called to love and support their children. This love involves discipline and the teaching of God’s Law. Discipline seems harsh to our post-modern ears, but Proverbs tells us that discipline is necessary for life (12:1; 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13; 29:15). St. Paul speaks to the Ephesian fathers, “Do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (6:4). The preacher of Hebrews spends a large portion of chapter 12 on the need for discipline in order to prove that you are a legitimate child of God. Jesus tells the church in Laodicea, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Revelation 3:19). Discipline is not a harsh, hateful thing. It is a parent showing their love and support for their child by teaching them right from wrong.

6 Do not covet your neighbor's possessions. Do not be greedy. Do not join your soul with the proud, but converse with the humble and righteous. Receive the trials that happen to you as good, knowing that nothing happens without God.

Covetousness and greed go hand in hand. Three of the Ten Commandments speak on these vices. Coveting and greed cause pride to swell up in the heart. Only through association with the humble and righteous cane we see ourselves in our true position before God. Coveting and greed taint our view, making it seem that God is only blessing us while things are going well.

Barnabas points us back to Job’s response to his wife, “Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” (2:10) Even the evil trials of this life are blessings from God (Romans 8:28). We do not see it in the moment, but many great things come about because of trials and tribulations.

7 Do not be double-minded nor talkative. Obey your masters as a type of God in modesty and fear. Never command your slave or handmaid, who hope in the same God, in bitterness lest they cease to fear God who is over both of you. He did not come to call with respect of persons, but those whom the Spirit has prepared.

Double-mindedness affects how we relate to each other. We cannot have a doubled mind because we will be judged by the same God as they will. There is no room for showing respect to some while ignoring others. The same God is God of everyone—master, slave, employer, employee, parent, child, believer, unbeliever.

8 Have all things in common with your neighbor and do not say anything is your own. For if you share in their incorruption, how much more with what is corruptible?

Many people want to link Christianity and socialism. Acts 4-5 shows that there was a more communal economy with the Church in Jerusalem. “Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need” (Acts 4:34-35). Barnabas makes his first appearance in Acts during this time as one of the landowners who sold property to help those in need (Acts 4:36-37).

The issue with the popular notion of “Christian socialism” is that there was no denouncement of landowners. Nowhere in Scripture is the possession of property prohibited. In fact, for the Church to provide for the poor among them, some of them **had** to own property! Where else would they get the money to distribute?

The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century were among the first to publicly decry private ownership of property. This was, in part, a necessity to retreat from the world into their colonies. The colonies were owned by the whole community. No one person had ownership rights. This is still true among the Amish and Mennonites, their theological descendants. The elders of the community, acting under the auspices of the Apostles (Acts 4:35), distribute what is needed to every member.

Barnabas is not calling for an end to Christians owning property. He is calling Christians to share their temporal wealth with those who also share in the incorruptible wealth of the Gospel. He asks a question that should convict the heart: “For if you share in their incorruption, how much more with what is corruptible?” If we are going to share the everlasting joys of Heaven with them, how can we not share with them in the blessings God has given us in this world?

Don't be hasty with your tongue, for the mouth is a snare of death. As far as you are able, keep your soul pure.

St. James reminds us, “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell” (3:6). Our tongue typically keeps us from having peace with our neighbors. Our words can take a situation and make it completely worse. This can be seen when Cain answers God with the wonderful question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9) Moses’ tongue keeps him out of the Promised Land because he grew so angry with the Israelites that he violently struck the rock instead of speaking to it (Numbers 20:1-13). An unbridled tongue can get us into **so** much trouble!

9 Do not be found stretching out your hands to take, and closing them to give. Love everyone who speaks to you the Lord's Word as the apple of your eye. 10 Remember the day of judgment night and day. Seek daily the saints' presence, either laboring through the Word, going out to exhort, striving to save souls by the Word, or working with your hands for the redemption of your sins. 11 Do not hesitate to give, neither grumble when you give, but know who is the good paymaster of your reward. “Keep the precepts” that you have received, “adding nothing and taking nothing away.” Utterly hate evil. “Give righteous judgment.”

Almsgiving is an integral part of the Christian community. Ananias and Sapphira are an excellent case of being stingy in almsgiving (Acts 5). Christians are called to be selfless givers, following our Lord’s example of emptying Himself when He took on human flesh (Philippians 2:5-8).

As the COVID-19 pandemic showed, many people are more willing to receive than they are to give. Sirach also shows this (4:31). Hands are very willing to open their hand to receive something for free, but they clinch their fist tight when they are asked to give. Unfortunately, this doesn’t happen only in pandemics and tragic situations. It is an intrinsic part of sinful human nature.

To battle the sinful human nature, Barnabas encourages Christians to be in God’s Word. Not only listening but loving those who speak to you. This encouragement links to the epistle to the Hebrews, where the encouragement is given to “remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (13:7).

Why do we care about God’s Word so much? Judgment Day is coming. All of us will stand before Christ’s judgment seat to answer for our lives. The measurement with which we will be measured in God’s Word. Not just what is written down in our Bibles. Primarily, we will be measured against the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. If you are in Him, you will be judged righteous. If you are not in Him, you will be condemned as unrighteous.

With this in mind, we seek to be in the Christian congregation as often as possible. This includes weekly worship services, Bible studies, fellowship events and outreach opportunities. All of these help to strengthen the love we have for the saints.

12 Do not make schisms, but peaceably reconcile those who fight. Confess your sins. Do not pray with an evil conscience. This is the way of the light.

Those who purposely seek to create schisms among Christians will not find themselves in Heaven on the Last Day. When St. John saw the new Jerusalem descend from Heaven, he finished his description with a gentle reminder: “Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 21:27).

Does this mean we shouldn’t try to correct and reprove heresy? Absolutely not! In fact, the exact opposite is being said. Those who are teaching false doctrine are the ones creating schism. We are to lead peaceable live, seeking reconciliation where it is possible. This means that confession of sins is necessary from those teaching falsely, but it is also necessary for the orthodox teachers to grant Absolution without strings for the repentant.

Barnabas ends his description with an admonition to have a good conscience while we pray. We cannot properly pray with an evil conscience. Even if we pray one of the Psalms that seeks vengeance against our enemies, we cannot pray them with malice but with a heart seeking our enemies’ repentance and the restoration of peace between us.

**Chapter 20**

1 But the way of the Black One is crooked and full of cursing. It is the way of eternal death with punishment, which is the destruction of their souls: idolatry, boldness, arrogance of power, hypocrisy, double-heartedness, adultery, murder, robbery, pride, transgression, fraud, malice, stubbornness, witchcraft, magic, covetousness, lacking the fear of God; 2 persecutors of good, hating truth, loving falsehood, not knowing the reward of righteousness, not cleaving to good or righteous judgment, not attending to the widow and the orphan, being wakeful not in fear of God but in pursuit of vice, being far distant from meekness and patience, loving vanity, pursuing recompense, not pitying the poor, not working for those oppressed with toil, ready to slander, without knowledge of their Maker, ready to slaughter children, corrupting God's creation, turning away the needy, oppressing the suffering, advocating for the rich, lawless judges of the poor, altogether sinful.

The way of the Black One, the way of darkness, the way of death can only lead to the eternal destruction of the soul. While the pleasures of this way may be enjoyable, they are also fleeting. The great laundry list of sin and vice that characterizes the way of darkness shows the great diversity that sin has created in our world. When you look at this list—or any list of sins—you see that there is no limit to sin. There is no place where you have committed all the sin that you can commit. All it shows is that man is altogether sinful. We have been from conception. Many sins just lead to another and then another. They only end to this way is the destruction of the soul in Hell.

**Chapter 21**

1 Therefore it is good to learn the Lord's ordinances, which have been written, so that you may walk in them. For those who do these things will be glorified in God's kingdom. He that chooses the opposite will be destroyed together with his works. On account of this is the resurrection, which is the recompense.

The way of darkness is clearly seen in our world, but the way of light can only be seen and understood through God’s Word. Through His Word, you know and believe in the promise of the resurrection on the Last Day. Everyone will be raised at that time to receive the recompense for their deeds in this life. Those who have followed the way of darkness will be condemned. Those who have followed the way of light will be glorified.

2 I ask those in high positions, if you will receive any advice of my goodwill, having among yourselves those to whom you may do good. Do not leave them behind. 3 The day is at hand when everything will be destroyed together with the evil one. The Lord is at hand with His reward. 4 Still also I ask you: Be good lawgivers to each other. Remain faithful counselors to each other. Remove all hypocrisy from you.

Barnabas reaches out to those in authority in this last chapter. These are the elders and bishops in the congregation, but the same can be said to the secular authorities. Barnabas tells both sets of authority figures to seek out those to whom they can do good. This good is done so that they are not left behind in their poverty. This good should be done because “the Lord is at hand” (Philippians 4:5). The Day is coming when everyone will be rewarded for their deeds. This good, done for the less fortunate, demonstrates your faithfulness to the Lord.

5 Now may God, who rules over the whole universe, give you wisdom, understanding, prudence, knowledge of His ordinances and patience. 6 Be taught of God, seeking out what the Lord requires from you, in order that you may be found faithful in the day of judgment.

As Barnabas begins to close his epistle, he blesses his hearers so that they may be taught by God. This is the same blessing the Prophets said would happen when Christ comes (Isaiah 2:3; 54:13; Jeremiah 31:33-34; Micah 4:2). When you are immersed in the study of God’s Word, you will be found faithful and receive the crown of life on the Last Day (Revelation 2:10).

7 If there is any good memory, remember me and meditate on these things so that my desire and watchfulness may find some good result. I ask you as a favor. 8 While the good vessel is with you, do not leave any behind, but diligently seek these things and fulfill every commandment; for these things are worthy. 9 Therefore I was more zealous to write to you, so that I give you joy. Be saved, children of love and peace. The Lord of glory and of all grace be with your spirit.

Again, Barnabas encourages everyone to look around them. To see what good they can do so that their neighbor might not be left behind. To share “the good vessel” of God’s Word with everyone. By doing these things, we show ourselves as children of love and peace.

1. Several high-ranking members of society were brought into the Church by the Apostles. They include: Cornelius the centurion (Acts 10); the Proconsul of Cyprus (Acts 13:12); Greek women of high standing (Acts 17:12); Crispus, the ruler of the Corinthian synagogue (Acts 18:8); members of Caesar’s household (Philippians 4:22); and Joanna, the wife of Herod Antipas’ steward Chuza (Luke 8:3). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Psalm 18:44 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Jeremiah 31:10 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Jeremiah 4:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Isaiah 55:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Isaiah 1:2; 51:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Psalm 49:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23; cf. Isaiah 40:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Deuteronomy 10:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. KJV, ASV, AMP, HCSB, CJB, GNV, JUB, MSG, NIV, NRSV, RSV, YLT [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. AMP (2015), CEV, GW, NASB, NKJV [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. ESV, NLT [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. ISV, NET [↑](#footnote-ref-13)