

## Appendix 17

# The Barnabas Connection

Many Muslims make great claims for a book known as 'The Gospel of Barnabas.' According to this manuscript, Muslims have proof that Islam is the superior religion. This book is amazing, as it 'proves' that Jesus is a Muslim.

You will find this book available in most Muslim bookshops, but not in Christian bookshops. Yet it is reported to be an authentic gospel that records the life of Jesus Christ. Most Christians have never heard of it. It claims:



'The Gospel of Barnabas is the only known surviving gospel written by a disciple of Jesus, that is by a man who spent most of his time in the actual company of Jesus during the three years in which he was delivering his message. He therefore had direct experience and knowledge of Jesus's (sic) teaching, unlike all the authors of the four accepted Gospels. Since it foretells the coming of Muhammad, and denounces the crucifixion (sic), and Trinity, it was sentenced to be destroyed and hidden for centuries. Finally, one can get a copy of this Gospel and find out just exactly why it was hidden.'

This Gospel is used by Muslims in defence of Islamic teaching. There are some 222 'chapters', many of which are very short. It is an extremely confused book. On one hand there are statements that contradict the Qur'an (which Muslims put forward as reasons why Christians should believe its authenticity), and on the other hand there are many statements that contradict the four gospels of the New Testament Scriptures. With respect to the birth of Christ, the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she is to be the 'mother of a prophet.' (Chapter 1). Later it describes how Barnabas is supposed to have become involved.

'The angel Gabriel presented to him as it were a shining mirror, a book, which descended into the heart of Jesus, in which he had knowledge of what God hath done and what God hath said and what God willeth insomuch that everything was laid bare and open to him; as he said unto me: "Believe, Barnabas, that I know every prophet with every prophecy, insomuch that whatever I say the whole hath come forth from that book."' <sup>ii</sup>

Barnabas is included among twelve disciples in Chapter 14. The 'true' character of God is taught by Jesus together with the impossibility of God having sons in Chapter 17. Chapter 95 is a description of a supposed sermon given by Jesus in which he teaches God's transcendent character, but does not refer to him as 'My Father.' Chapter 215 describes how four angels (Gabriel, Michael, Rafael, and Uriel) are sent on God's instructions to 'take Jesus out of the world', and how Judas Iscariot was put to death in Jesus' place (Chapter 217, see also Sura 4:157). Adam's creation is detailed in Chapter 39.

'Adam, having sprung upon his feet, saw in the air a writing that shone like the sun, which said: "There is only one God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God. ..."' <sup>iii</sup>

'Adam besought God, saying: "Lord, grant me this writing upon the nails of the fingers of my hands." Then God gave to the first man upon his thumbs that writing; upon the thumb-nail of the right hand it said: "There is only one God," and upon the thumb-nail of the left it said: "Muhammad is Messenger of God." Then with fatherly affection the first man kissed those words, and rubbed his eyes, and said: "Blessed be that day when you shall come to the world."' <sup>iv</sup>

There are prophecies of the Prophet Mohammed's coming in Chapters 45, 82, 96, and he is even mentioned by name in Chapters 44, 54, 97, 112, and 163. Jesus denounces the idea that he is the 'Messiah.' The final chapter, which is quoted in entirety, seeks to put the record straight.

'After Jesus had departed, the disciples scattered through the different parts of Israel and of the world, and the truth, hated of Satan, was persecuted, as it always is, by falsehood. For certain evil men, pretending to be disciples, preached that Jesus died and rose not again. Others preached that he really died, but rose again. Others preached, and yet preach, that Jesus is the Son of God, among whom is Paul deceived. But we – as much as I have written – we preach to those who fear God, that they may be saved in the Last Day of God's Judgment. Amen.'<sup>v</sup>

So it is not surprising that Muslims are excited about this 'gospel.' They claim that it is 'more authentic than the NIV or KJV' – and because it contradicts the Qur'an this proves a Muslim could not have written it. They also claim that Christians have suppressed it, because it contradicts the New Testament accounts.

One Muslim, Ata ur-Rahim, claims that it is of ancient origin, that it is 'the only surviving gospel written by a disciple of Jesus', while he makes several unsubstantiated conjectures:

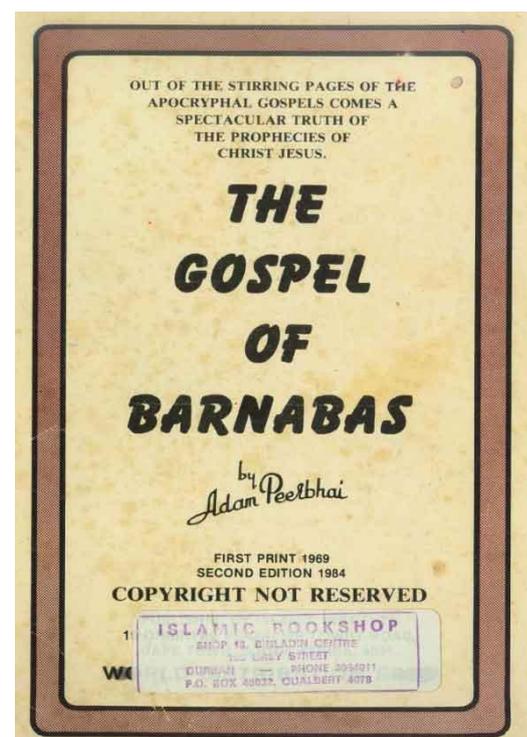
'It is not known when he wrote down what he remembered of Jesus and his guidance, whether events and discourses were recorded as they happened, or whether he wrote it soon after Jesus had left the earth, fearing that otherwise some of his teaching might be changed or lost. It is possible that he did not write down anything until he had returned to Cyprus with John Mark. The two made this journey some time after Jesus had left the earth, after parting company with Paul of Tarsus, who had refused to make any further journeys with Barnabas on which Mark was also present. But no matter when it was written, and although it too, like the four accepted Gospels, has inevitably suffered from being translated and filtered through several languages it is, at least, an eye-witness account of Jesus's life.'<sup>vi</sup>

It is claimed to be the most authentic gospel in our possession, and that it was accepted as a canonical gospel in the churches of Alexandria until AD 325. Ata ur-Rahim also makes other astounding claims.

'It is also known that it was being circulated in the first and second centuries after the birth of Jesus from the writings of Iraneus (130-200 A.D.), who wrote in support of the Divine Unity. He opposed Paul whom he accused of being responsible for the assimilation of the pagan Roman religion and Platonic philosophy into the original teaching of Jesus. He quoted extensively from the Gospel of Barnabas in support of his views.'<sup>vii</sup>

Reputable biblical scholars have examined such claims and find that there is no basis for giving any authenticity to this manuscript. There are a number of important reasons. There are no early manuscript editions of this gospel. The earliest script is only available after the 15<sup>th</sup> century, an Italian manuscript that was purportedly discovered in the Vatican. No early church father has ever quoted from it, nor is it ever referred to until the 15th century, nor has there ever been any allusion to it in the heated debates among Christians and Muslims between the 7th and 15th centuries (but the canonical books of Scripture were often quoted).

The Gospel of Barnabas appears to have been confused with the first-century *Epistle of [Pseudo] Barnabas* (circa AD 70-90), which is an entirely different book. It appears that Muslim scholars have assumed that the two were identical. Also some have mistakenly assumed that the Apocryphal Acts of Barnabas (written before AD 478) was the Gospel of Barnabas. There is a statement in the former concerning Barnabas which disproves they were the same: 'Barnabas, having unrolled the Gospel, which



*we have received from Matthew his fellow-labourer, began to teach the Jews.*'<sup>viii</sup> So the phrase in italics is deliberately omitted, which gives a different emphasis, then implies a gospel written by Barnabas.

The internal evidence of the Gospel of Barnabas is also critical. Jesus says 'I am not the Messiah' (Chapters 42, 48), but the Qur'an repeatedly refers to Jesus the 'Messiah' (Surah 5:19,75). There are references to geography that are wholly inaccurate; for instance, Nazareth is not a fishing village, and Jesus could not have sailed there by boat (Chapters 20,21).

Reading through the Gospel of Barnabas it is clear that if the author was not a Muslim he had strong Muslim sympathies. The expressions used in the Gospel of Barnabas are very Qur'anic. Internal evidence (for example, other references to medieval culture) demonstrates a much later time of writing. Also some Muslim scholars have actually cast doubt on the authenticity of the Gospel.

'As regards the 'Gospel of Barnabas' itself, there is no question that it is a medieval forgery ... It contains anachronisms which can date only from the Middle Ages and not before, and shows a garbled comprehension of Islamic doctrines, calling the Prophet the 'Messiah', which Islam does not claim for him. Besides its farcical notion of sacred history, stylistically it is a mediocre parody of the Gospels, as the writings of Baha Allah are of the Koran.'<sup>ix</sup>

Another strange quirk of the Gospel of Barnabas is that it uses the text from the fourth-century Roman Catholic Vulgate translation of the Bible. It also includes exaggerations of the Biblical accounts mentioning, for example, 144,000 prophets, and 10,000 prophets being slain 'by Jizebel.' These figures have particular significance in Islam. Other mistakes include the fact that this writing claims that Jesus was born when Pilate was governor, when he actually became governor in AD 26-27.

As stated earlier, the writing has the hallmark of the author having inside knowledge of Islam. In the Gospel of Barnabas Jesus is said to have preached from the 'pinnacle' of the temple – hardly a comfortable place – but this is translated into Arabic by the word *dikka*, the platform used by the *imam* in mosques. Indeed, in all, some fourteen Islamic elements have been identified throughout the text. Jesus is represented as coming only for Israel, but Mohammed 'for the salvation of the whole world' (Chapter 11). The denial that Jesus is the 'Son of God' is thoroughly Qur'anic. Jesus' sermon is modelled after a Muslim *khutba* which begins with praising God and his holy Prophet (chapter 12).

The Gospel of Barnabas is usually ignored by Christians, but its existence should be addressed because of the emphasis that many Muslims place on it. We can quite categorically say that this book is a medieval fabrication, possibly written by a Muslim convert. It is obviously a re-write of the life of Jesus by someone who is basically acquainted with the Qur'an, who wanted to show that Jesus taught Islam and predicted the coming of Mohammed. The events of the Cross are portrayed as in the Qur'an and other Muslim writings, in a vain attempt to discredit the historical truth of Jesus' death and resurrection.

The Gospel of Barnabas is simply a fabrication that is elevated to authoritative status by Muslims who see it as a means to justify their own Qur'anic teaching and to undermine the true Christian position on the person of Jesus Christ. It is an unashamed attack on Christian truth that comes out of the Muslim arena.

In our seeking to share the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ we must present the Word of God authoritatively. We must face up to the accusations and inferences made concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, and know how to answer what is untrue. Also, we must graciously and lovingly seek to bring those who hold on to error into the light of the true gospel.

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- <sup>i</sup> The Light of Islam: . Section: *The Gospel of Barnabas*: Introduction (sourced online 2006, it is no longer available, but is the quoted words of Ata ur-Rahim, part quoted in [The Gospel of Barnabas](#): Introduction.) It is a quotation from **ur-Rahim, Muhammad Ata**, *Jesus: A Prophet in Islam*, p.37.
- <sup>ii</sup> [The Gospel of Barnabas](#) (pdf), Chapter 10: ¶1.
- <sup>iii</sup> [The Gospel of Barnabas](#) (pdf), Chapter 39: ¶2.
- <sup>iv</sup> [The Gospel of Barnabas](#) (pdf), Chapter 39: ¶4.
- <sup>v</sup> [The Gospel of Barnabas](#) (pdf), Chapter 222: ¶1.
- <sup>vi</sup> **Muhammad Ata ur-Rahim**,: [Article](#): *Full text of 'Jesus: The Gospel of Barnabas' Prophet of Islam*: p.113, Chapter 5 ¶2 (The book itself may be purchased at Amazon.co.uk).
- <sup>vii</sup> *ibid*: p.114, Chapter 5 ¶8.
- <sup>viii</sup> Answering Islam: [Article](#): *The Gospel of Barnabas*, item 5: *When was the Gospel written*: ¶2 (quoting Glasse, Cyril, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989, p.65).
- <sup>ix</sup> Answering Islam: [Article](#): *The Gospel of Barnabas*. Glasse, Cyril, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989, p.78, last paragraph).