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THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS & THE EPISTLE OF BARNABAS

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INTRODUCTION

The literature which shaped the early church is known by the majority of Christians by what can be found in their Bibles. As one explores the first few centuries of the church, however, it is fascinating to find that there were many other writings which shaped and inspired people of faith during those times. *The Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Epistle of Barnabas* are two such writings and are somewhat unique because of their inclusion immediately following the New Testament in the fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus,¹ which is one of the most important manuscripts for Biblical studies, and because both “enjoyed great veneration in the early Church, and long struggled for a place in the canon.”² For these reasons this paper will examine their formation, their purpose and use in the early church, and the reasons for their ultimate exclusion from the New Testament Canon.

THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS

The writing known as *The Shepherd of Hermas* was often cited and was regarded by many as inspired, as is evidenced by its vast attestation in the manuscript evidence,³ which shows that “it was copied and read more widely in the second and third centuries than any other noncanonical book, even more than many of the books that later came to be included in the New Testament.”⁴ The book is comprised of three sections which include 5 *Visions*, 12 *Mandates*, and 10 *Similitudes* in which the author is instructed on the necessity of his own repentance and is given messages from God’s representatives which he is instructed to share with Church leaders.

¹ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:169 (Ehrman; LCL).

² J. W. C. Wand, *A History of the Early Church to AD 500* (London: Methuen & Co., 1937), 41.

³ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 63.

⁴ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:162 (Ehrman; LCL).

Author

Much of what is known of the author is from claims within the writing itself. Hermas says that he was a Christian, sold as a slave in Rome and then set free. He then was married and became a businessman, attaining wealth, but not always lawfully. Through persecution he lost his property, at which point his children turned on him, but eventually the entire family repented and was restored to the faith. He also claims to be a contemporary of Clement of Rome (c. A.D. 96)⁵, but the allegorical nature of the writing makes the autobiographical details hard to trust.⁶

A variety of theories on the authorship of *The Shepherd* emerge in the early church. Origen and Jerome connect the writer to the Hermas in Romans 16:14, but most dismiss this suggestion as necessitating too early a date of writing. Perhaps the most significant clues to the identity of the author come from the Muratorian Fragment. “There are two major positions on its relevance: it represents either the canonical list of the Western church in the late second century or of the Eastern (or possibly Western) church in the fourth century.”⁷ It contains an insightful anecdote on *The Shepherd*, which, if it is correct, gives clear indication of the identity of the author:

The *Pastor*, moreover, did Hermas write very recently in our times in the city of Rome, while his brother bishop Pius sat in the chair of the Church of Rome. And therefore it also ought to be read; but it cannot be made public in the Church to the people, nor *placed* among the prophets, as their number is complete, nor among the apostles to the end of time.⁸

Most modern critics trust this document enough to date *The Shepherd* around the middle of the second century. Some have merged this information with the internal evidence so that Metzger

⁵ E. A. Livingston, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (3d. ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 760.

⁶ Wand, *A History*, 41.

⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 600.

⁸ *The Muratorian Canon* (ANF 5:603).

hypothesizes: “that Hermas was a younger contemporary of Clement and wrote (and perhaps published) sections of his rambling treatise at intervals over a considerable period of time, finally gathering them together in one volume toward the middle of the second century.”⁹

This idea that the writing took shape at intervals over a period of 20-30 years has become common in the study of *The Shepherd*, and many propose that it was composed by several authors.¹⁰ Nautin argues that it was the “work of a compiler who has brought together and retouched two pre-2nd-century books, of which one was the work of a certain Hermas and the other anonymous.”¹¹ Possible evidence of this is found in the Bodmer Papyrus, which contains only *Visions* 1-4, while the third century Michigan papyrus has *Vision* 5 through the end of the *Similitudes*.¹² Add to this the literary details in which the woman personifying the church disappears after *Vision* 4 and is replaced in *Vision* 5 by the angelic shepherd who had previously been absent. Osiek points out that the first four *Visions* are much more apocalyptic and believes that what is now *Vision* 5 was originally an introduction to the *Mandates* that follow. She then cites Geit as proposing that *Visions* 1-4 were written by the original Hermas, a contemporary of Clement of Rome; that *Similitude* 9 was written by the brother of Pius in the middle of the second century; and that the rest was by an unknown author sometime later.¹³

A counter argument shows that Tertullian and Clement quote portions as a unity which would be separate under this theory as the manuscripts in question are later than both men. Ehrman points out that these arguments, alongside the similarities in theme and vocabulary such

⁹ Metzger, *The Canon*, 64.

¹⁰ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:2 (Lake; LCL).

¹¹ P. Nautin, “The Shepherd of Hermas,” *EEC* 1:377.

¹² *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:166 (Ehrman; LCL).

¹³ Carolyn Osiek, “The genre and function of the Shepherd of Hermas” (*Semeia* no. 36, January 1, 1986; *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*), 114.

as the “emphasis on sin, repentance, doublemindedness, [and] purity” make it more likely that it was written by one person over time or that it was originally passed down orally.¹⁴ Verheyden explains the logic of this point, suggesting that a single author laboring over the same questions for many years, even decades: “would account for the repetitious, and at times somewhat contradictory, treatment of the material, in part using the same symbols and allegories.”¹⁵

Date

Most modern scholars accept as satisfactory the evidence from the Muratorian Fragment and date *The Shepherd* to A.D. 140-155.¹⁶ Kee strengthens this stance by pointing out that many of the issues discussed in *The Shepherd* are those that were debated with the Montanists during this period.¹⁷ Ehrman dates it within a range of 110-140,¹⁸ Grant slightly earlier from 90-120,¹⁹ and Wand, while dating it to the traditional A.D. 150 range, believes that some parts might go back to Trajan.²⁰ Internal evidence hints at an early date, suggesting an early church structure with a plurality of presbyters and no singular bishop (*Visions* 2.4.2-3).²¹ Also, the work would have to be early if the statement in *Visions* 2.4: “you will write two little books, sending one to Clement and the other to Grapte,”²² is to be taken as the Clement who wrote from Rome to Corinth. Guy elaborates that “Hermas apparently assumes the existence of plural presbyterial rather than monoepiscopal leadership.”

¹⁴ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:166 (Ehrman; LCL).

¹⁵ Joseph Verheyden, “The Shepherd of Hermas” (*Expository Times* 117, no. 10, July 1, 2006; *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*), 398.

¹⁶ Livingston, *Oxford Dictionary*, 760.

¹⁷ Howard Clark Kee, *The Beginnings of Christianity: An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 352.

¹⁸ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:169 (Ehrman; LCL).

¹⁹ Robert M. Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 73.

²⁰ Wand, *A History*, 41.

²¹ Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak* (Austin: Sweet, 1971), 173.

²² *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:193 (Ehrman; LCL).

Purpose and Use in the Early Church

The Shepherd of Hermas was “more popular before the fourth century than any other noncanonical writing”²³ having clearly been read widely both by individuals and publicly to churches in many places.²⁴ There is no question that it not only claimed to be inspired but was viewed as such by many in the early church.²⁵ The author reported these visions to the Churches leadership and “presumably they gave their stamp of approval, for otherwise it would be hard to imagine how Hermas’ work would have been—as it was—rapidly transmitted to various Christian communities, including (by the end of the second century) those at Lyons (Irenaeus), Antioch (Theophilus), and Alexandria (Clement).”²⁶

This popularity, as we see from the Muratorian Fragment, was more on the popular level than the ecclesiastical one. It was an apocalyptic treatise, full of allegory which both challenged and inspired those private citizens who were able to read or hear the story as it reassured them that God was watching while calling them to live a Godly life. It was written in such a way as to be embraced by many as what has been called the “first Christian Romance”²⁷

A predominant topic of the book is the honor given to those who have been martyred for their faith. This aspect has been suggested as the reason for which Hermas writes and yet it is conversely argued that there was no universal threat of persecution on record to which *The Shepherd* would have been responding. If their existed painful memories of Nero’s persecution,

²³ Guy, *Introducing Early Christianity*, 44.

²⁴ David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998), xvii.

²⁵ Abbe Louis Duchesne, *The Early History of the Church* (trans. Claude Jenkins. 3 vols. London: Oliver & Boyd, 1909), 110.

²⁶ Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament*, 24.

²⁷ Wand, *A History*, 41.

particularly in Rome, and if there had simply been enough martyrdoms for it to make the Christians fearful, then “one should distinguish between 'facts' and the perception and assessment of Christians constantly trying to cope with feelings of insecurity.”²⁸

It is clear that one of the purposes for this writing, and perhaps a contributing factor in its popularity, is the teaching on the topic of repentance. There is clearly a focus throughout on church discipline and repentance which “is always a present possibility but never a future promise.”²⁹ It seems that the community to which Hermas belonged believed that after baptism Christians must live sinless lives and could not be forgiven for sins after conversion.³⁰ In response, his visions reveal that through repentance, salvation can still be attained but that this was a once-only second chance. This became the standard, early and in the West,³¹ and Lake states emphatically that “it is obvious that we have here the beginning of the Catholic doctrine of penance.”³² This view, however, is not universally accepted, as Osiek shows:

I would dispute the usual assumption that the principal concern of Hermas as a whole is the promulgation of a second repentance, and that the book is thus most properly catalogued as a step along the way to later penitential discipline. That it serves this function in the development of ecclesiastical penitence may be true, but this neither exhausts nor even properly names the function and importance of *The Shepherd* for its contemporaries or for the vitality of the early church.³³

She goes on to argue that instead the writer is attempting to help his community realize the practical impact their eschatological hopes should have on their daily lives.³⁴

²⁸ Verheyden, “The Shepherd of Hermas,” 400.

²⁹ Ferguson, *Early Christians*, 186.

³⁰ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:2 (Lake; LCL).

³¹ Guy, *Introducing Early Christianity*, 241.

³² *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:3 (Lake; LCL).

³³ Osiek, “The genre and function of the Shepherd of Hermas,” 117.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

Whatever the author had in mind, it is clear that he intended to inspire change in “a context of Christian sluggishness” which had caused many in the community to be focused on their personal prosperity; which explains his use of the term ‘doubleminded’ over 50 times. The cure for this lack of focus was repentance and simplicity and we see him repeatedly state his moralizing concerns.³⁵ One of the reasons for this sluggishness was a focus on business, noted especially by the growing divide between rich and poor in the church. This theme is seen in the third *Vision* where both the leaders and the wealthy are rebuked and called to repent. These may have been one and the same because many of the early church leaders were likely to have been the wealthy owners of the houses where the churches met and for this reason their role as gracious hosts is emphasized.³⁶

An interesting final note on the topic of repentance is the Montanist rejection of *The Shepherd* because of its offer of a second repentance.³⁷ Tertullian, who had accepted *The Shepherd* early on, changed his perspective once he joined the Montanists:³⁸

“But I would yield my ground to you, if the scripture of “the Shepherd,” which is the only one which favours adulterers, had deserved to find a place in the Divine canon; if it had not been habitually judged by every council of Churches (even of your own) among apocryphal and false (writings); itself adulterous, and hence a patroness of its comrades.”³⁹

In examining *The Shepherd's* connection to Biblical writings, it can be most easily compared with several Old Testament Apocryphal works, having an Apocalyptic Framework

³⁵ Guy, *Introducing Early Christianity*, 45-47.

³⁶ Ibid., 241.

³⁷ Bercot, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 337.

³⁸ Morton Scott Enslin, *The Literature of the Christian Movement* (New York: Harper & Row, 1938), 468.

³⁹ *Tertullian* (ANF 4:85).

based on 2 Esdras⁴⁰ and ethical and devotional characteristics similar to the *Wisdom of Sirach*.⁴¹ It also appears to borrow ideas from *The Epistle of James*, as “whole sections of the Shepherd seem to have been framed with evident recollection of that Epistle.” The most striking example is the use of the word doubleminded, found only in James in the New Testament and, as stated earlier, used frequently in *The Shepherd*.⁴²

Another potential place of contact with the New Testament is viewing *The Shepherd* as a response to Hebrews 6:4-8, 10:26-31, and 12:17, which seem to teach that repentance after baptism is impossible.⁴³ Grant feels there is no substance to this theory, seeing no evidence of Hermas knowing Hebrews, though he thinks he knew Matthew, Mark, John, and Ephesians.⁴⁴

Early Citations and Manuscript Evidence

It has already been shown that *The Shepherd* was a very popular book for early Christians as can be seen by how “more than twenty separate parchment or papyrus fragments, dating from the second to the sixth centuries, have survived of the Greek text, as well as portions of it in two Latin versions (of the second and the fourth century respectively)” and in a variety of other languages.⁴⁵ Ehrman gives the names of these manuscripts and their dates in the introduction to his translation.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament*, 73.

⁴¹ Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 122.

⁴² Metzger, *The Canon*, 66-67.

⁴³ Enslin, *The Literature of the Christian Movement*, 309.

⁴⁴ Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament*, 72-75.

⁴⁵ Metzger, *The Canon*, 63.

⁴⁶ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:170-71 (Ehrman; LCL).

The Shepherd is also cited often by a variety of Church Fathers including Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine, among others.⁴⁷ Clement of Alexandria clearly accepted its inspiration⁴⁸ saying: “Did not the Power also, that appeared to Hermas in the Vision, in the form of the Church, give for transcription the book which she wished to be made known to the elect? And this, he says, he transcribed to the letter, without finding how to complete the syllables. And this signified that the Scripture is clear to all.”⁴⁹ Origen shows his awareness of its disregard while stating his belief that the Spirit was at work: “*The Shepherd*, which seems to be despised by some, where Hermas is commanded to write two little books, and afterwards to announce to the presbyters of the Church what he learned from the Spirit.”⁵⁰ Athanasius attests that it served as a textbook for catechumens but was not canonical,⁵¹ and Jerome says that it was almost unknown in the West. While it is clearly increasingly less popular from the 4th century on,⁵² it does show up in a 4th century insertion to the 6th Century Codex Claromontanus which contains both *Barnabas* and *The Shepherd* in its New Testament.⁵³

THE EPISTLE OF BARNABAS

In contrast to *The Shepherd of Hermas*, “*Barnabas* is a ‘scholarly’ author who has read widely and quotes frequently from a variety of books.”⁵⁴ He fuels his polemic with nearly 100 formulas of quotation, a quarter of which are from the Septuagint of Isaiah, in addition to various Psalms

⁴⁷ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:169 (Ehrman; LCL).

⁴⁸ William Farmer and Denis M. Farkasfalvy *The Formation of the New Testament Canon: An Ecumenical Approach* (New York: Paulist, 1983), 17-18.

⁴⁹ *Clement of Alexandria* (ANF 2:510).

⁵⁰ Origen (ANF 4:539).

⁵¹ Enslin, *The Literature of the Christian Movement*, 309.

⁵² Livingston, *Oxford Dictionary*, 760.

⁵³ Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament*, 177.

⁵⁴ Metzger, *The Canon*, 57.

and references from the Pentateuch, while the only New Testament reference is a quotation of Matthew.⁵⁵ In addition to these biblical references, Ehrman suggests that the author also drew from the circulation of a kind of “testimonia”; a compilation of proof texts used to combat traditional Jewish thought.⁵⁶ This seems a likely suggestion because the focus of the first 17 Chapters of The Epistle is certainly to convince any wavering Christians as to the dangers of reverting to Judaism.

Author

Ferguson gives three proposals for the authorship of Barnabas: that it was anonymous and wrongly ascribed in the manuscript tradition to Barnabas; that it was pseudonymous; or that it was a different Barnabas than the companion of Paul.⁵⁷ These proposals leave out the companion of Paul as an actual candidate because virtually no modern scholar defends that position. A post A.D. 70 date (legend asserts that Barnabas was martyred at Salamis in 61⁵⁸), an apparent non-Jewish authorship, and the fact that “from what we can tell, the historical Barnabas did not share this author’s view of Judaism (cf. Gal 2:13-14),”⁵⁹ all combine to eliminate him as a possibility.⁶⁰

It is proposed, however, that perhaps this Barnabas influenced the thought of the eventual writing: “perhaps by way of a sort of “Barnabean School, which preserved and promulgated his teachings.” The fact that Clement of Alexandria brought The Epistle it to its most prominent

⁵⁵ Robert A. Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary III* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965), 19-20.

⁵⁶ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:6 (Ehrman; LCL).

⁵⁷ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 214.

⁵⁸ F. L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 132.

⁵⁹ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:6 (Ehrman; LCL).

⁶⁰ Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 337.

place allows for the suggestion that perhaps Clement came from the same “school” as Barnabas, simply at a later date. While it clearly shares the Alexandrian affinity for allegory, it lacks the typical Logos terminology or philosophical usage in Alexandrian thought. Also problematic for this hypothesis are affinities to Palestine, particularly to Qumran discoveries with a similar allegorical exegesis of the Old Testament and a ‘two-ways’ approach.⁶¹ Modern criticism ultimately places it either in Asia Minor⁶² or Syro-Palestine.⁶³

Date

The most relevant information on the dating of the *Epistle of Barnabas* is the internal evidence in 16:3-4: “See, those who have destroyed this temple will themselves build it. This is happening. For because of their war, it was destroyed by their enemies. And now the servants of the enemies will themselves rebuild it.”⁶⁴ This clearly puts the date of writing after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70. There are those who feel a date in the 70’s is justified,⁶⁵ or others like Bercot,⁶⁶ Richardson, and Shukster suggest a date just before A.D. 100, but the majority of scholars date it around A.D. 130.⁶⁷ The reason for this upper limit is that the *Barnabas* passage assumes a temple still in ruins and therefore must precede Hadrian’s construction of a temple to Zeus-Jupiter in A.D. 135. Many argue that the language of *The Epistle* suggests the anticipation

⁶¹ Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 44-45.

⁶² F. Scorza Barcellona, “The Epistle of Barnabas,” *EEC* 1:111.

⁶³ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:8 (Ehrman; LCL).

⁶⁴ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:71 (Ehrman; LCL).

⁶⁵ Geisler, *From God to Us*, 121-122.

⁶⁶ Bercot, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 65.

⁶⁷ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:7 (Ehrman; LCL).

of the building project, and therefore a date of writing just prior to the Bar-Kochba rebellion of A.D. 132-35.⁶⁸

Other attempts to fix the date use the 10 kings in Chapter 6, a citation of Daniel 4:3-5 where one ruler emerges to overthrow three others at once. This approach identifies these rulers with the Roman Emperors and suggests a date well within the limits of first century.⁶⁹ Overall this theory is viewed as problematic because of the inherent guesswork necessary.⁷⁰

A final theory hinges on manuscript evidence suggesting that *The Epistle* is not a single piece of literature but that instead a composite of two works written at different times. Under this assumption it has been suggested that the first part, including the citation above, was written around A.D. 130 and then later expanded sometime between A.D. 150-175 to include the teaching material of the later chapters.⁷¹

The theory that Barnabas is an example of “evolved literature” proposes that an individual reshaped older writings to create the form that is now preserved.⁷² The main reason for this argument is that *Barnabas* and *The Didache* share a section (B 18-21, D 1-6:2) on ethical exhortation that seems to either be *Barnabas* using *The Didache*, *The Didache* using *Barnabas*, or both using a common source. Goodspeed elaborates:

It is evident that two short Christian tracts have been put together. And this becomes a conviction when we find that each part has been found by itself in a Latin version. The Latin translation of Barnabas extends only through chapter 17, which is properly finished off with a doxology. The remaining portion has also been found in a Latin version (published by Schlecht in 1899), which is entitled the teaching of the Apostles and

⁶⁸ Edgar J. Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1942), 31.

⁶⁹ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:337 (Lake; LCL).

⁷⁰ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:7 (Ehrman; LCL).

⁷¹ Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature*, 33.

⁷² Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 1.

contains almost every line of Barnabas chapters 18-20 but arranged in quite another order.⁷³

The third alternative is supported by a similar find at Qumran (Manual of Discipline 3:18ff). This literature focuses on a 'two ways' theme that came into Christianity through Hellenistic Judaism and is concerned with eschatology and its effect on the lives and activities of those in the community.⁷⁴ Goodspeed proposes that their common source was a work entitled *De Doctrina Apostolorum*. He explains that this was

composed early in the second century; that a Greek *Barnabas* was written about A.D.130, and appears reflected in the Latin version of chapters 1-17; that with the aid of this short form of *Barnabas*, the primitive didache was expanded soon after A.D. 150 into the Greek *Didache* published by Bryennius; and that *Barnabas* itself in turn was later with the aid of the primitive didache expanded into the present Greek *Barnabas*.⁷⁵

The modern consensus is that the source used by *The Didache* and *Barnabas* is now lost.⁷⁶

Purpose and Use in the Early Church

The Epistle of Barnabas is similar to *The Shepherd* in its popularity in the early church because of its defense of the faith and its emphasis on a righteous path. What is perhaps most noteworthy is the writings' appropriation of the Hebrew scriptures, rejecting the literal interpretation of the Jewish people and teaching that "all the religious practices by which they thought to form a relationship with God were just a misunderstanding"⁷⁷ because "the Hebrew Scriptures, so far from enjoining Judaic practices, had an esoteric sense, which he professes to reveal."⁷⁸

⁷³ Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature*, 31-32.

⁷⁴ Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 4-7.

⁷⁵ Edgar J. Goodspeed, "The Didache, Barnabas, and The Doctrina" *The Literature of the Early Church* (vol. 2 of *Studies in Early Christianity: A Collection of Scholarly Essays*. ed. Everett Ferguson, New York: Garland, 1993), 2.

⁷⁶ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:5 (Ehrman; LCL).

⁷⁷ F. Scorza Barcellona, "The Epistle of Barnabas," *EEC* 1:111.

⁷⁸ Livingston, *Oxford Dictionary*, 159.

Barnabas’ thought is certainly far more discriminatory of Judaism than anything in the New Testament and it seems logical to consider it as an antecedent to which Gnosticism was the climax.⁷⁹ Farmer describes the tension the early church must have faced in their conflicted relationships with the Jews and the context in which Marcion took the only step more extreme than that of the Epistle of Barnabas by rejecting the Old Testament altogether.⁸⁰

An interesting example of *Barnabas*’ Old Testament hermeneutic is his treatment of the days of creation and their relation to the Sabbath and to Jewish Apocalyptic interpretation. He encourages Christian observance of Sundays as a day of rejoicing, “apparently to the exclusion of the traditional Jewish Sabbath-rest (18:8f).”⁸¹ Barnabas 15:8-9 says:

Moreover he says to them, “I cannot stand your new moons and Sabbaths.” You see what he means: It is not the Sabbaths of the present time that are acceptable to me, but the one I have made, in which I will give rest to all things and make a beginning of an eighth day, which is the beginning of another world. Therefore also we celebrate the eighth day with gladness, for on it Jesus arose from the dead, and appeared, and ascended into heaven.

This same approach shaped *Barnabas*’ eschatological hopes which had precedent in Jewish Apocalyptic. One view was that the world would last 6,000 years, followed by a Messianic Millennium which would give way to a final heavenly existence. The other view held that this age would last for 7,000 years ending in judgment and destruction to be followed by God’s reign. The early church was influenced by these views as they pointed out that eight were saved from the flood, that circumcision was commanded on the eighth day, and even in designing early baptisms as octagons. They logically also expected Christ’s return on this day.⁸²

Early Citations and Manuscript Evidence

⁷⁹ Wand, *A History*, 40.

⁸⁰ Farmer, *The Formation of the New Testament Canon*, 132.

⁸¹ Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 39.

⁸² Ferguson, *Early Christians*, 76.

The three most important manuscript witnesses to the *Epistle of Barnabas* are Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Hierosolymitanus, which dates from 1056, and a family of 9 Greek manuscripts from the eleventh century. There is also a third century Latin version “which is now preserved only in a single corrupt ninth-century manuscript: Codex Corbeiensis.” This manuscript contains chapters 1-17 in a much shorter form than the Greek.⁸³ There are also various minor Syriac fragments⁸⁴ it is mentioned in table of contents of Codex Bezae.⁸⁵ Finally, “the Clermont List, representing Egyptian usage about A.D. 300, has it at the end of the Catholic or general letters, between Jude and the Revelation of John.”⁸⁶

The Epistle was much more popular in the East where it was viewed as a general epistle and was championed most by Clement of Alexandria, its first undisputed witness, and who considered it as much scripture as 1 Peter and 1 John.⁸⁷ He quotes *Barnabas* on 8 different occasions in his *Stromateis* and identifies the author not only as the apostle Barnabas, but also as one of the seventy whom Jesus sent out. According to Eusebius, Clement wrote a commentary on the *Epistle*, but had the following to say himself:

Among the rejected writings must be reckoned also the Acts of Paul, and the so-called Shepherd, and the Apocalypse of Peter, and in addition to these the extant epistle of Barnabas, and the so-called Teachings of the Apostles; and besides, as I said, the Apocalypse of John, if it seem proper, which some, as I said, reject, but which others class with the accepted books.⁸⁸

⁸³ Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 17-18.

⁸⁴ *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2:10 (Ehrman; LCL).

⁸⁵ Geisler, *From God to Us*, 121-122.

⁸⁶ Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature*, 34-35.

⁸⁷ Enslin, *The Literature of the Christian Movement*, 468.

⁸⁸ Eusebius, *Church History from A.D. 1-324* 3.25 (NPNF² 1:157).

Origen accepted it while acknowledging that others did not, and Jerome lists it among the apocryphal writings.⁸⁹

EXCLUSION FROM THE CANON

As has been shown, both of these writings were cited as scripture by a variety of the Church Fathers and were very popular through the first four centuries. The final question is why they were ultimately considered inferior to other books which were included in the canon, some of which may have been less popular. Enslin is rather creative in proposing that late acceptance of some of the general epistles in comparison with “much more lengthy and pretentious writings like *I Clement*, *Barnabas*, and *the Shepherd*” was their modest length in relation to their value to the church.⁹⁰ The Muratorian Fragment shows that a writings liturgical use is important, regardless whether it is edifying for an individual. “From this we see how the key factor for canonization is not whether documents can be read or used by individuals but whether they are to be read publicly in worship.”⁹¹

By A.D. 367, Athanasius recognizes the current list of 27 books, while admitting several others, including *The Shepherd*, for instructional but not liturgical purposes. The North African Council of Carthage (A.D. 397) placed an emphasis on their role for public worship,⁹² and recognized, along with Gregory of Nazianzus, and Amphilochius the same basic list by the end of the 4th century.⁹³

⁸⁹ Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature*, 34-35.

⁹⁰ Enslin, *The Literature of the Christian Movement*, 320.

⁹¹ Johnson, *The Writings*, 601.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 602-3.

⁹³ Grant, *The Formation of the New Testament*, 177.

Cullman argues that the main test of canonicity was apostolicity for the west and inspiration for the east.⁹⁴ On the other hand, Farkasfalvy comments on the Shepherd that “while its quality of inspiration might have entitled it to a place among the prophets, the canon of the prophets was closed by the time of its composition, and it could not claim a place among the apostolic writings. If second-century prophecy were admitted to the canon, there would be too many strange claimants for inclusion.”⁹⁵

Their distance from true apostolic thought certainly played a role in their ultimate exclusion, perhaps especially in the case of Barnabas. Johnson feels that it was this epistle’s virulent attack on Judaism, to which many Christians no doubt still had ties, which had an impact on its ultimate standing. He argues that works were excluded which:

cut the bonds of this people with their Jewish ancestors, that systematically distinguish between the elite and the herd, or that make the denial of creation the mark of authentic holiness. Such tendencies work precisely to destroy community. The present writings of the NT have as their almost exclusive focus the shaping of communities into a common identity. That is why they were chosen in preference to others that had no such interest.⁹⁶

Even if writings were considered completely orthodox, the ‘Rule of Faith’ was not the sole criteria for canonicity, as is demonstrated by *The Didache*.⁹⁷ Instead, the ‘Rule of Faith’ “was accepted as a norm alongside scripture only because it was considered as having been fixed by the apostles.”⁹⁸ As time went by, “the prestige of the apostles grew ever greater as their number diminished, and they finally all passed away. They alone seem to be entitled to speak to the

⁹⁴ Oscar Cullman, “The Tradition,” *The Bible in the Early Church* (vol. 3 of *Studies in Early Christianity: A Collection of Scholarly Essays*, ed. Everett Ferguson, New York: Garland, 1993), 88.

⁹⁵ Dennis M. Farkasfalvy, “Theology of Scripture in St. Irenaeus,” *The Bible in the Early Church* (vol. 3 of *Studies in Early Christianity: A Collection of Scholarly Essays*, ed. Everett Ferguson, New York: Garland, 1993), 59.

⁹⁶ Johnson, *The Writings*, 607.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 606.

⁹⁸ Cullman, “The Tradition,” 88.

Church.”⁹⁹ This brings us to perhaps our most salient criteria as apostolicity was the most commonly mentioned standard in the Fathers and meant that canonicity was absolutely dependant on apostolic sponsorship.¹⁰⁰

For these reasons, it can be concluded that *The Shepherd of Hermas*, while immensely popular and considered to be useful to building the faith of Christians, “was eventually excluded from the canon...in part because it was known not to have been written by an apostle.”¹⁰¹ In the same way, despite its longstanding influence, once the Church Fathers concluded that it could not have been Barnabas who wrote the Epistle by his name, they could neither accept it among the universally accepted books of the New Testament Canon.

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⁹⁹ Duchesne, *The Early History of the Church*, 109.

¹⁰⁰ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 736.

¹⁰¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 251.

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