Jesus, seeing that great was the multitude of them that returned to their heart for to walk in the law of God, went up into the mountain, and abode all night in prayer, and when day was come he descended from the mountain, and chose twelve, whom he called apostles, among whom is Judas, who was slain upon the cross. (Ragg and Ragg 1907:25)

The Gospel of Barnabas (GB) is considered by many Muslims to be the definitive narrative of the life of Jesus ('Isa al Masih). Its author has been purported to have been one of 'Isa’s twelve disciples, yet the GB contains details not found in the four biblical gospels, including new stories stating that ‘Isa did not die on the cross as Christians teach and that Judas was substituted for Jesus. The prophet Mohammad is mentioned by name in the GB. On this basis, the canonical Gospels are summarily discarded as false.

Among the first modern scholars to consider this work were Londale and Laura Ragg, a husband and wife team, who translated the GB in 1907 with an introductory disclaimer explaining their own disbelief in its validity. Thus, the Raggs’ original work is widely cited by researchers.

Two manuscripts yielding 222 chapters of the GB exist, but not in Aramaic, Greek, or Hebrew, the languages spoken at the time. A number of scholars have studied the Ragg’s translation to ascertain its authorship and the date of origin. Researchers have found references to other literature, including Dante’s *Devina Comedia*, challenging the history presented by several Islamic websites. The juxtaposition of historic artifacts within the text cannot be explained by simple transcription errors in authorship. How should Christians and Muslims deal with these discrepancies?

The GB has been re-translated and reprinted in many Muslim countries, without the Raggs’ authoritative introduction, or their copyright.
Muslims embracing the cut version ignore the historical, geographical, prophetical, and symbolic discrepancies that argue with the Qur'anic and biblical texts as well as established historical works. Why Muslim printers in Pakistan have continued reprinting the pirated work can be vaguely comprehended by understanding Islamic culture; a Muslim may lie to protect his religion from dishonor. This seems to have been reason enough for Muslim publishers to remove the Raggs’ introduction, as it discredited its alleged origin and thus the validity of this bogus work.

The GB’s validity is vital to Muslims; if it is false, then the GB’s message about who ‘Isa is becomes untrustworthy. Moreover, if the GB is false, then without a doubt, Iblis (the name for the devil in the Qur’an) is certainly deceiving Islam about ‘Isa. If the GB is a forgery, then it discredits Islam, the Qur’an, and their proponents. Hence, missiologists require a basic knowledge of the GB and its history to share with both Christian and Muslim communities.

A Major Concern

Unfortunately, the author and the date of writing are unknown. The most conclusive evidence of the GB’s origin is found in its writing. The GB’s wording belies its origin, its authorship, its spiritual history, and the author’s bias. Tell-tale indicators from the wording indicate that it was not written in the first century and therefore is not a true testimony of the events that transpired. Instead, it is likely the invention of a disgruntled sixteenth century convert to Islam. Christian researchers have suggested an author from a variety of religious backgrounds, but everyone has discounted its validity.

Forgeries are created to deceive and this author intends to convince the unsuspecting public of its authenticity, while attempting to disprove that Jesus is God. This explains its nonexistence in first century literature.

The Physical Condition of the Manuscript

As with any work of antiquity, the physical condition of its manuscript may tell us much about the history of the work. Since its appearance is out of character for the alleged date of authorship, it lacks convincing proof of first century writing (Ragg and Ragg 1907:xiii). The front papers of the manuscript include a dedicatory preface by John Frederic Cramer when he gave it to Prince Eugen of Savoy in 1713. It then found its way into the Hofbibliothek at Vienna in 1738 (lxvii).

How The Gospel of Barnabas was “found” reads like a cheap detective novel.

There is a preface prefixed to it, wherein the discoverer of the origi-
nal MS, who was a Christian monk, called Fra Marino, tells us, that having accidentally met with a writing of Irenaeus (among others), wherein he speaks against St. Paul, alleging, for his authority, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, he became exceeding desirous to find this Gospel; and that God, of his mercy, having made him very intimate with Pope Sixtus V, one day, as they were in that Pope’s library, his Holiness fell asleep, together and he, to employ himself, reaching down a book to read, the first he laid his hand on proved to be the very gospel he wanted. Overjoyed at the discovery, he scrupled not to hide his prize in his sleeve; and on the Pope’s awakening, took leave of him, carrying with him that celestial treasure by reading of which he became a convert to Mohammedanism. (Sale 1850:liii)

The work has undergone a strange and somewhat marvelous history, but is it true? First of all, it seems unlikely that a Christian monk would steal this book. Why would he need to steal it from the Pope? Furthermore, if he was a spiritual man, why would he not return it? As a reliable witness, our wayward monk lacks credibility. It is a work that had to be “stolen” or seemingly extricated from a hostile religion in order to give it an air of validity (as well as salability) to its uneducated audience.

There are two original manuscripts, a complete Italian one and a partial Spanish one. J. N. J. Kritzinger suggests that the GB has a Spanish origin, while James W. Brown suggests an Italian origin (Brown 1932:7). For Kritzinger, references to the gold Spanish coins indicate a date and origin, coming into circulation almost 650 years after ‘Isa (Kritzinger 1980:58). The Spanish manuscript lacks chapters 121-200 (Oddbjurn 2001:5, 6) and the persecution of believers during the inquisition is a marker that indicates a Spanish origin (Kritzinger 1980:58).

The unity of the manuscripts and identical authorship is noted by Jan Slomp. The GBS (GB Spanish) mentions the archangels Azrael and Azrafel, as if writing for Muslims; the GBI (GB Italian) reads Rafael and Uriel as if writing for Christians, while marginal notes in Arabic of the GBI use Azrael and Azrafel (Slomp 1997:98).

**Dating the Work**

When was *The Gospel of Barnabas* written? Several dates have been given, but all lack certainty. A general dating based upon certain unique words and concepts used in the text and inferences based upon other literary works with similar themes has been presented by several researchers. One such unique feature mentioned by scholars is the matter of the “Jubilee.”

Chapter 82 in GB says, “And then through all the world will God be worshiped, and mercy received, insomuch that the year of jubilee, which
now comes every hundred years, shall by the Messiah be reduced to every year in every place. Then the woman left her waterpot and ran to the city to announce all that she had heard from Jesus” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:191). Chapter 83 also refers to the year of Jubilee. “After the prayer of midnight; the disciples came near to Jesus, and he said to them: ‘This night shall be in the time of the Messiah, Messenger of God, the jubilee every year that now comes every hundred years’” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:193).

Two references occur in The GB for a “Jubilee” occurring at one hundred year intervals, as compared to the Jewish fifty year interval. This dates the work after the first Jubilee of Boniface VIII when it was intended to be a centennial celebration. However, because the “Jubilee” was such a financial success, it was instated as a semi-centennial occurrence. Thus, the dating would be pinned in the years immediately following the first celebration in 1300. (Brown 1932:21, 22)

Consider also the strong resemblance to Dante’s Divine Comedia. Many of the ideas are similar, indicating that Dante’s work preceded it. While it could be that The Gospel of Barnabas was written first, there is no reference made to it in other writings. Chapter 135 of the GB references seven centers of hell, which also occurs in Dante’s work (Cantos V and VI).

Other phrases, “to Hell and to intolerable snow and ice” in chapter 106 reflect Cantos twenty-eight and three. . . . The author of The Gospel of Barnabas picked up another of Dante’s ideas which disagree with the Qur’an. Thus we know that it was Dante’s work that was copied and not the other way around. Barnabas records “that the heavens are nine” in chapter 178. Sura 2:29 records that there “are seven heavens.” This is a problem because Dante lived in the Middle Ages, from 633-699 AH. (Selim and Gairdner 1975:19-21)

Another piece of evidence that dates the GB is its use of St. Jerome’s version of the Bible, indicating that the work was written after St. Jerome’s Bible (Brown 1932:141, 142). The Middle Ages dating of the GB is consistent among a vast majority of unbiased researchers. Among the proofs offered is the lack of any other known records of the work from earlier times (Slomp 1978:74). The Raggs were also convinced that the earliest possible date for the manuscript was the Middle Ages. “The paper on which it is written is coarse and stout cotton-paper and has a water-mark of an anchor within a circle which, according to M. Briquet, is distinctively Italian, and this particular design resembles most closely specimens that are dated about the third quarter of the sixteenth century (Brown 1932:6).

While most researchers reference a Spanish or an Italian origin, a few
researchers suggest others of the same time frame. Dr. John Bowman suggests a Samaritan high priest named Ishmael of Damascus (Slomp 1997:103, 104), while another researcher, Theodore Pulcini, suggests a Carmelite monk of Cypriot origin as the author of the GB (2001:194-205).

**Christian Comments on The Gospel of Barnabas**

*The Gospel of Barnabas* has drawn a lot of disparaging comments from the Christian researchers who have studied it. Christians viewing the GB note numerous divergences from the biblical record, including inconsistencies deemed impossible to co-exist with the scriptural gospels. Muslims, seeing any challenge to the GB as a threat to their belief structure, insist that it is the Bible that has been falsified.

Why was *The Gospel of Barnabas* written in the first place, and what purpose was it intended to serve? What possible motives would its creator have had to compose and publish such a work?

When the forger is a modern sculptor and he wants to make replicas of old Greek statues or paintings of the Dutch Golden Age in order to sell them as genuine, he uses skills and materials to make his artifacts appear old and antique. This was successfully done by the Italian sculptor Arceo Dossena and the Dutch painter Han van Meegeren. Artists make either exact copies, or composite creations combining aspects of an old piece, adding their own ideas, and produce work in the style of the old master. The author of the GB used the second method (see the analysis by the Raggs and Luis Bernabe’): he combined and remodeled elements of the four canonical gospels and added his own material and perspective in order to create a new harmonious whole. The means vary with the purpose of the forger, who is usually very skillful. (Slomp 1997:86)

“There is one major problem with the forgery—the problem of changing the face of Judas to exactly resemble the face of Jesus. All the people who saw the crucifixion believed without question that it was Jesus who was crucified. So the question remains, who perpetrated this hoax?” (Ayad 1987:84).

**Possible Reasons for the Writing of The Gospel of Barnabas**

Researchers John Bowman and Jan Slomp offer possible motives for the writing of this work.

As to *The Gospel of Barnabas*, the basic plan of its author was to exalt Ishmael over Isaac and Muhammad over Jesus. . . . John the Baptist who features in the Qur’an disappears from this Gospel. Jesus is now
the forerunner of the Messiah Muhammad. Judas is the crucified. Jesus is translated to the third heaven. He will return and show he did not die and then on the third day go to the third heaven again. The author of *The Gospel of Barnabas* uses the Four Gospels recognized by the Church Catholic (and as selected and altered by him) as the ground for presenting his own views. (Bowman 1992:24)

We will first look at the motives: love, anger, hatred, revenge, greed, personal gain, the desire for recognition and fame, the desire to promote a cause, to establish a historical claim, to justify an opinion or a faith, the desire to deceive or to embarrass or simply to play a hoax. (Slomp 1997:86)

Desperate times existed for Muslims during the inquisition; perhaps this provided sufficient motivation for the author or authors to concoct this work.

The inquisition posed an obstacle to making serious inquiries. . . . The R.C. Church in those days in Spain fostered a deep-seated need to believe in miracles, which fact fostered popular belief in the miraculous discovery of these “lead-books.” The miserable position of the Moriscos provided a situation in which it seemed fully justified to deceive the authorities. That this never came about is because both the GBI and the GBS remained hidden for more than a century and never appeared among the people for whom they were meant in the first place, and shows that the initial effort to deceive failed miserably. (Slomp 1997:86)

The atmosphere of the time of the writing of *The Gospel of Barnabas* was difficult. Material gain may have been the motive for writing GB and other new “gospels” as artists and other craftsman were often commissioned or supported by wealthy patrons to practice their craft, astounding the masses.

**Once a Weapon, Always a Weapon**

Colin Chapman presents as a very obvious reason for the writing of *The Gospel of Barnabas* its specific use as a weapon by Muslim apologists who reprint the work without the Raggs’ introduction, distributing it all over the world (Chapman 1985:351-352). By establishing the GB as a source of truth, publishers bash Christian theology for vengeance and immediate profit without considering its dubious historic significance. It is also interesting to note that the Muslim world also had other plagiarisms and literary hoaxes going on at this time (Slomp 1997:87).
Why Muslims Should Reject The Gospel of Barnabas

One of the major complaints that even Muslims should recognize is that The Gospel of Barnabas contains too many errors and problems for an author who claimed to have been a witness to the acts of Jesus, and thus a citizen of first century Palestine. For example, a noticeable Islamic spin has been placed on the book, indicating that it was written after Mohammad. The Qur’an was based upon a rendition of the four Gospels (the Injil) and not the GB. Thus, if a Muslim holds faith in the Gospel of Barnabas, then he must ignore major segments of the Qur’an since both books cannot be correct. Many of the errors and problems in the GB fall into seven major classifications.

Historical Errors

A legitimate Jewish Barnabas would have a sound knowledge of the biblical record, the identity of the various authors of the Scriptures, and would have been unfamiliar with future events and customs. Notice a comparison of the Gospel of Barnabas, chapter 160 with 2 Chronicles 18:1-3.

Then said he who writes: “Daniel the prophet, describing the history of the kings of Israel and their tyrants, writes thus: ‘The king of Israel joined himself with the king of Judah to fight against the sons of Belial (that is, reprobates) who were the Ammonites’. Now Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and Ahab, king of Israel, being seated both on a throne in Samaria, there stood before them four hundred false prophets, who said to the king of Israel: ‘Go up against the Ammonites, for God will give them into your hands, and you shall scatter Ammon.’” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:373)

Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab. And after certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramothgilead. And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, “Wilt thou go with me to Ramothgilead?” And he answered him, “I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war.” (2 Chr 18:1-3 KJV)

It is interesting to note that nowhere in the biblical record of Daniel the prophet does he mention Ahab, Jehoshaphat, or the Ammonites. Jan Slomp comments that according to the GB, Daniel becomes the author of 2 Chronicles 18 (1978:78).

There is another discrepancy in GB 152 where it says, “Whereupon straightway the soldiers were rolled out of the Temple as one rolleth casks
of wood when they are washed to refill them with wine” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:355). Jesus in his discourse speaks about new wine being placed in old wine skins. Yet in GB chapter 152, ‘Barnabas’ references wooden casks; wooden wine casks suggest medieval Europe (Kritzinger 1980:49).

Notice one more example in GB chapter 80. “Daniel as a child, with Ananias, Azarias, and Misaell, were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in such wise that they were by two years old when they were taken; and they were nurtured among the multitude of idolatrous servants” (Ragg and Ragg 1907: 185). A two-year-old Daniel as mentioned in GB 80 is not supported by the Bible. Would a two-year-old Daniel be inclined to say, “Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink?” (Dan 1:12).

Geographical Errors

An author who walked with Jesus would certainly be familiar with the conditions around Nazareth and Jerusalem. However in GB chapter 20 it says, “Jesus went to the Sea of Galilee, and having embarked in a ship sailed to his city of Nazareth; whereupon there was a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was nigh unto sinking. And Jesus was sleeping upon the prow of the ship. Then drew near to him his disciples, and awoke him, saying: ‘O master, save thyself, for we perish!’ . . . Having arrived at the city of Nazareth the seamen spread through the city all that Jesus had wrought, whereupon the house where Jesus was, was surrounded by as many people who dwelt in the city” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:41). There is no way one can sail to Nazareth—it is located on a high plateau far above the Sea of Galilee.

Then in GB chapter 21, ‘Barnabas’ reports Jesus traveling from Nazareth up to Capernaum. “Jesus went up to Capernaum, and as he drew near the city behold there came out of the tombs one that was possessed of a devil” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:43). Again, the Sea of Galilee is down from Nazareth, not up.

Jesus returns to Nazareth in GB chapter 143, followed in the narrative in chapter 151 by this statement: “Jesus then embarked on a ship.” In chapter 152, it says, “Jesus having come to Jerusalem.”

Summarizing these verses, the author has Jesus and the disciples sail by ship in and out of Nazareth, and arrive by ship at Jerusalem. This would be a very difficult journey no doubt, because neither Nazareth nor Jerusalem is a port city; Nazareth is twenty-five miles from navigable water at an elevation of 1,830 feet, whereas Capernaum is located nearly 700 feet below sea level (See Luke 4:31, John 2:12.).

It may not be possible to know who wrote this hoax, but it is clear that he knew nothing of the geography of the Holy Land.
Time Errors

When an author writes a historical book in the past tense, it is important not to allude to works written after the time period the book purports to have been written in. ‘Barnabas’ claims to have been a disciple of Jesus, but the author of the GB clearly made references to things that only became known at a much later date. Barnabas was a disciple, not a prophet who could look into the future. “This manuscript prophesied not only about the Prophet of Islam but also offered much of the Islamic teaching. It is exceedingly clear that many of the paragraphs in the Book of Barnabas are a literal translation of the Koran, or have the same meaning” (Ayad 1986:85).

There is another problem with the dating of the book. The author of *The Gospel of Barnabas* uses the Vulgate Bible according to the scholar Gilchrist (The Gospel of Barnabas). This is a problem because history indicates that the Vulgate translation came into existence about AD 380. Another problem occurs in chapter three of the GB where it indicates that Pilate was ruling Judea at the birth of Jesus (Ragg and Ragg 1907:7). This is not true, as Herod was ruling at his birth in Matt 2:1. Pilate began ruling in 26 CE and condemned Jesus to death several years later (Pontius Pilate).

Another time error occurs in GB chapter 166 where the author of the book references the book of Romans (9:18) at a time prior to Saul’s conversion. Jesus and his disciple Andrew are speaking. “Andrew replied: ‘But how is that to be understood which God said to Moses, that he will have mercy on whom he wills to have mercy and will harden whom he wills to harden’” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:385)

After referencing Romans prior to Paul’s conversion, the author of Barnabas repeatedly refers to Paul as one deceived of Satan. “Among whom also Paul hath been deceived, whereof I speak not without grief; for which cause I am writing that truth which I have seen and heard, in the intercourse that I have had with Jesus, in order that ye may be saved, and not be deceived of Satan and perish in the judgment of God” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:3). “Others preached, and yet preach, that Jesus is the Son of God, among whom is Paul deceived” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:489). How could a disciple of Jesus talk about Paul who had not yet come into the picture?

Foreign Word Usage Errors

Spelling becomes another problem for the author of *The Gospel of Barnabas* because spelling variations were regional in nature. This lack of understanding suggests that the author was not familiar with the various cultures and the regional spelling variations. In GB chapter 91 it says,
“The Roman soldiery, through the operation of Satan, [had] stirred up the Hebrews, saying that Jesus was God come to visit them. So great [was the] sedition [that] arose, that near the Forty Days [quadragessima] all Judea was in arms, such that the son was against the father, and the brother against the brother” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:211)

The term used is “quadragessima,” but it is usually spelled “quadragesima.” Quadragessima was a term for Lent and originated from the Council of Nicaea, which occurred a long time after the author of the GB would have died. Another example is the spelling of Muhammad in GB chapter 106, which is Machometo, a spelling used in Europe until fairly recently, showing that it originated in Europe and not Palestine (Kritzinger 1980:49).

It is also uncertain whether the author knew that the Holy Qur’an attributes the title Al-Masili to Jesus and not to Muhammad (Slomp 1978:87).

Then said the priest: “How shall the Messiah be called, and what sign shall reveal his coming?” Jesus answered: “The name of the Messiah is admirable, for God himself gave him the name when he had created his soul, and placed it in a celestial splendour.” God said: “Wait Muhammad; for your sake I will to create paradise, the world, and a great multitude of creatures, whereof I make you a present, insomuch that whoever shall bless you shall be blessed, and whoever shall curse you shall be accursed. When I shall send you into the world I shall send you as my Messenger of salvation, and your word shall be true, insomuch that heaven and earth shall fail, but your faith shall never fail.” Muhammad is his blessed name. (Ragg and Ragg 1907:225-227)

There are also subtle indicators of the medieval feudal system, for example, of barons in chapter eleven (see Ragg and Ragg 1907:301, 393; Kritzinger 1980:49).

Changes in the Character of Jesus

The four biblical Gospels witness to the character of Jesus, his mission, and his methodology. The methodology is evident in the style that he communicated with the people. A marked difference exists between the biblical gospels and the GB. In GB chapter 161 the following discourse is not consistent with his teaching in the Gospels. Notice what the GB says. “Whereupon Jesus said; ‘Lying is indeed a sin, but murder is a greater, because the lie is a sin that appertaineth to him that speaketh, but the murder, while it appertaineth to him that committeth it, is such that it destroyeth also the dearest thing that God hath here upon the earth, that is, man’” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:377).

In the next example as found in three different chapters in the GB...
(chaps. 42, 82, 96), the character of Jesus has been consistently altered into that of John the Baptist. Since John the Baptist is left out of the GB, moving the character of John the Baptist into Jesus’ character does not seem to present an obvious conflict as the author places the words of John the Baptist into Jesus’ mouth. “Then said Jesus: ‘I am a voice that crieth through all Judea, and crieth; ‘Prepare ye the way for the messenger of the Lord,’ even as it is written in Esaias’” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:97).

The mission of Jesus is changed, as he is made to foretell Mohammad as the coming Messiah:

The woman answered: “We look for the Messiah; when he comes he will teach us.” Jesus answered: “Know you, woman, that the Messiah must come?” She answered: “Yes, Lord.” Then Jesus rejoiced, and said: “So far as I see, O woman, you are faithful: know therefore that in the faith of the Messiah shall be saved every one that is elect of God; therefore it is necessary that you know the coming of the Messiah.” The woman said: “O Lord, perhaps you are the Messiah.” Jesus answered: “I am indeed sent to the House of Israel as a prophet of salvation; but after me shall come the Messiah, sent of God to all the world; for whom God has made the world.” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:191)

The priest answered: “In the Book of Moses it is written that our God must send us the Messiah, who shall come to announce to us that which God wills, and shall bring to the world the mercy of God. Therefore I pray you tell us the truth, are you the Messiah of God whom we expect?”

Jesus answered: “It is true that God has so promised, but indeed I am not he, for he is made before me, and shall come after me.” The priest answered: “By your words and signs at any rate we believe you to be a prophet and an holy one of God, wherefore I pray you in the name of all Judea and Israel that you for love of God should tell us in what wise the Messiah will come.” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:221, 223)

In the next example the author of the GB has Jesus denying that he is the Messiah — just the opposite of what is found in the Gospels.

Shall you accordingly be punished of God? Jesus answered: “May it please God that I receive punishment of God in this World, because I have not served him so faithfully as I was bound to do.”

But God has so loved me, by his mercy, that every punishment is withdrawn from me, in so much that I shall only be tormented in another person. For punishment was fitting for me, for that men have called me God; but since I have confessed, not only that I am not God, as is the truth, but have confessed also that I am not the Mes-
siah, therefore God has taken away the punishment from me, and will cause a wicked one to suffer it in my name, so that the shame alone shall be mine. (Ragg and Ragg 1907:441, 443)

Scholars also note that the description of paradise in chapter 173 of the GB varies from the Gospel account (Brown 1932:47, 48). The GB suggests that all that God has given to men on earth is like a mite that Herod gives to a poor man; but God’s gift of paradise to men is like Herod’s gift of all he has and his own life to one of his servants. The GB has Jesus making an extravagant description of the abundance of paradise where he says, “A mountain of gold and pearls is more precious than the shadow of an ant, even so are the delights of paradise more precious than all. The delights of the princes of the world which they have had and shall have even unto the judgment of God when the world shall have an end” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:395, 397).

It is quite clear that the Barnabas account of Jesus depends very heavily upon the parables, miracles, and discourses of the Christ of the Gospels. It is readily apparent even to the casual reader that in the GB Christ’s methods and his personality lack the warmth and tenderness which characterize his teaching ministry in the Gospels. In the account given by the four Evangelists, one is attracted by the naturalness, the picturesque nature, and the clarity of Christ’s discourses. They seem to spring from a heart that is filled with compassion not merely for all humankind but for every individual. In the GB, however, the discourses are those of a skilled debater and are cold and uncaring (Brown 1932:44).

Another example of the character change typical of the GB is a discussion in chapter 163 between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus is led to speak of Mohammed. Barnabas is clearly using this as a device to instill a Muslim construction on the work, and once again, Barnabas (living during the time of Jesus) already knows of Mohammad.

The disciples answered, “O Master, who shall that man be of whom thou speakest, who shall come into the world?”

Jesus answered with joy of heart: “He is Mohammed, messenger of God, and when he cometh into the world, even as the rain maketh the earth to bear fruit when for a long time it hath not rained, even so shall he be occasion of good works among men, through the abundant mercy which he shall bring.” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:381)

James Brown further notes that in the GB that Jesus’ discourses always arise out of questions put to him, which are leads to draw him farther into his lecture. Brown believes that the teaching method is contrived (1932:43).
The creed in the so-called Book of Barnabas is the same as that of the Muslim belief. In this book we find that the author denied all upon which Christianity is based—the crucifixion of Christ and His resurrection. The author of the Italian manuscript believed that Jesus was not crucified but that God changed the face of Judas to be that of Jesus. Judas was arrested by the soldiers, mocked and crucified instead of Jesus, and Judas died on the cross and was buried. (Ayad 1987:84)

The Islamic Dimension

Christian researchers repeatedly point out that the book has been made to agree with Islamic thought; however, in other places, it does not even agree with Islamic tradition. Examples of this type of disagreement are found in chapters 191 and 208 that are not in harmony with Genesis 22. Perhaps the author of the GB was not aware of the meaning of the word Messiah as confusion and inconsistent use is found in the GB. In chapter 191 it says, “Therein is written that Ishmael is the father of Messiah, and Isaac the father of the messenger of the Messiah” (Ragg and Ragg 1907:427). In chapter 208 it says, “Verily I say, the son of Abraham was Ishmael, from whom must be descended the Messiah promised to Abraham, that in him should all the tribes of the earth be blessed” (459).

Yet in the GB chapters 42, 83, and 97, Jesus is not called the Messiah, though Jesus is called the Messiah/Christ in the Qur’an in Suras 5:75 and 5:17.

Ayad suggests that the author of the GB intentionally has attempted to install Islamic context and theology in his work (1986:86). “Barnabas” has changed the four Gospels to agree with the Islamic faith (87) and as a convert to Islam, has tried to convert the readers to his understanding of that religion (Slomp 1978:74, 75). This is a clever and deadly ruse for Muslims, and is akin to lacing aspiring with arsenic. By inserting Islamic theology, the author of ‘Barnabas’ has stripped ‘Isa of his divine work, unknowingly condemning many uninformed and unsuspecting Muslims to eternal damnation.

The Lack of Internal and External Evidence

Several commentators have indicated the lack of internal and external evidence for the first century existence of the GB. Jan Slomp is very succinct in his conclusion: “The G.B.V. (Italian) has no history prior to the last quarter of the 16th century and Jomier adds for Muslim readers, has no isnad. Therefore the authenticity of the G.B.V. cannot be proved on external grounds” (1978:74, 75).

Furthermore, ‘Barnabas’ makes mention of Mohammad in the time of Jesus, yet there is no mention of the GB in the Sunnah of the Prophet (Had-
ith). Jesus (‘Isa) and the Injil are mentioned in the Hadith, but the supposedly “only true gospel” is not mentioned there. Surely a book as important as the GB would have been mentioned by the Prophet, if it had existed.

Ismad is a hot topic within Islam and is commonly understood as a known “line of transmission.” Having isnad is akin to being able to tell who had possession of the words of Mohammad, or who maintained the words of the prophet. Isnad is used to substantiate that the words of Mohammad have been communicated through the ages and thus the words can be relied upon as being accurate to what he said. The isnad of a qur’anic text is of vital importance to Islam (The Forgery of the Gospel of Barnabas 2012).

If isnad is required by Muslims for their own holy writings, why is the GB exempt from this requirement? Why does this not disqualify the GB for Muslims?

Conclusions and Comments

Whoever wrote The Gospel of Barnabas lived after the translation of the Vulgate Bible, after the introduction of the Spanish coins, after the development of wooden casks, and after the poetry of Dante was written. The author was not familiar with the geography of the country or culture of the Holy Land. He did not know the ruler of the country during the time the apostle lived, nor does the author understand the language used.

In his attempt to validate the Qur’an and Mohammad as the Messiah, the author adds details that contradict the Qur’an, using as his support writers and details that did not yet exist at the time of Jesus. Furthermore, the lack of both internal and external consistency argues against its first century authorship. This “Barnabas” could not have walked with ‘Isa al Masih, thus his testimony is of no value; it is a contrivance. The Gospel of Barnabas becomes infamous as a forgery to the Western religious world.

Muslims who support The Gospel of Barnabas bring corruption into Islam by compromising the honor of their tradition. By mixing a belief in the Qur’an with a belief in the Gospel of Barnabas, Muslims do a great disservice to their religion and bring disrespect to their established Holy book. No good can come from this distortion.

It is hoped that missiologists and other Christian witnesses can ameliorate the Muslim perception of The Gospel of Barnabas, thereby removing the shame and dishonor it brings upon Islam by those who believe it to be true and use it as a source of their belief.

Works Cited


Jack McNeilus is active in a variety of ministries and has long had an interest in working among Muslims.