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Satan and Circumcision: The Devil as the ἄγγελος πονηρός in Barn 9:4

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Abstract

This study argues that the ἄγγελος πονηρός in Barn 9.4 was Satan. James Carleton Paget, Adolf Hilgenfeld, Ferdinand Prostmeier and Geza Vermes gestured toward this interpretation, but none offered evidence for this identification other than assertion. In Barnabas, there is a constellation of ideas that connect circumcision with Satan, namely circumcision with pagan idolatry (9.6), idolatry to demons (16.7), and finally idolatry and demons to Satan's ultimate rule (18.1; 20.1). Satan is also related to other obsolete Jewish cultic practices (2.4, 6; 16.1–2, 7). Barnabas also repeatedly describes the devil with the adjective πονηρός. Additionally, the fourth-century papyrus PSI VII 757r reads ἄγγελος ὁ πονηρός, identifying the angel as Satan. The "Ethiopianisation" of Satan as "the black one" (as argued by Clare Rothschild) confirms this reading. Since "Ethiopians" practiced circumcision, the devil as a "the black one" associates Satan with circumcision.

Keywords

Satan – Epistle of Barnabas – ἄγγελος πονηρός – circumcision – Ethiopians

1 Introduction

This short study argues that the ἄγγελος πονηρός in Barn 9.4 should be identified with Satan, which is also referred to in the text with the epithets ὁ πονηρός, ὁ ἄρχων, and ὁ μέλας. This interpretation was gestured toward by James Carleton Paget, and held by Adolf Hilgenfeld, Ferdinand Prostmeier and Geza

Vermes. However, none of these interpreters offered much in the way of evidence toward this identification other than assertion. In Barnabas, there is a constellation of ideas that connects circumcision with Satan. Circumcision is related to pagan idolatry (9.6), idolatry to demons (16.7), and finally idolatry and demons to Satan's ultimate rule over an alternative path than the path of God (18.1; 20.1). Satan is also connected to a number of other now obsolete Jewish cultic practices (namely the temple (16.1–2, 7) and temple sacrifices (2.4, 6)). The devil is repeatedly described with the adjective πονηρός in Barnabas, and an early textual variant attests to an early reception of the ἄγγελος πονηρός as a reference to Satan. The reconstructed text of the fourth-century papyrus PSI VII 757r reads ὁ πονηρός (ο πο̣νηρος), with the article serving to identify the angel specifically as Satan. This is confirmed when we consider the description of Satan as "the black one," which as Clare Rothschild has argued, "Ethiopianizes" the devil. "Ethiopians" were known for practising circumcision, and so the reference to the devil as "the black one" provides an implicit association of Satan with circumcision. The cumulative support of this evidence suggests that the identity of the ἄγγελος πονηρός in the literary context of Barnabas is best understood as a reference to the devil.

2 Jewish Circumcision and the ἄγγελος πονηρός in Barn 9.4

In the ninth chapter of Barnabas, the author continues what is a prominent thematic motif in the whole document: an anti-Jewish (anti-literal) exegetical strategy, consequently reinforcing the abolition of the Mosaic law for Christ followers.[1] Sacrifices and festivals are abolished (2.4, 6). The only truly important Sabbath is the eschatological "Sabbath" of resurrection (15.7–8). Fasting is

1 Barnabas clearly views Christianity as superseding the Jewish inheritance of the covenant of Israel. On this see Michael Kok, "The True Covenant People: Ethnic Reasoning in the Epistle of Barnabas," *SR* 40 (2011): 81–97, esp. 89–92. Although not necessarily relevant for our argument here, I follow recent interpreters in understanding Barnabas as having an Alexandrian provenance: Ferdinand R. Prostmeier, *Der Barnabasbrief* (Göttingen, 1999), 119–23; Pierre Prigent and Robert A. Kraft, eds., *Épître de Barnabé: Introduction, traduction et notes* (Paris, 1971), 20–2. Recently, Clare Rothschild has argued that the opponents that Barnabas has in view are not Jewish, but actually other Christians. The author "employs an anti-Jewish exegetical strategy … to stigmatize *Christian* opponents." Clare K. Rothschild, "Soteriology and the Allegorical Construction of Opponents in the Epistle of Barnabas," in Sōtēria: *Salvation in Early Christianity and Antiquity: Festschrift in Honour of Cilliers Breytenbach on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, eds David du Toit, Christine Gerber, and Christiane Zimmermann (Leiden, 2019), 561–576 at 562.

unnecessary (3.1–3). The laws of kashrut should only be interpreted allegorically and not literally (10.3–11). The temple is invalid (16.2), and, for the author of Barnabas, the covenant involving the practice of Jewish laws begins to be lost at Sinai (3.6) and finds its full end in the rejection of Jesus (5.11; 8.1; 14.5).[2]

Amid this stream of antinomian rhetoric, we find his reconfiguration of circumcision.[3] Barnabas focuses on the notion in the Jewish scriptures of "heart circumcision" (9.1), which appears in texts like Deut 10:16 and Jer 4:4. Focusing specifically on the circumcision of followers' ears (9.1–3), Barnabas understands "heart circumcision" to allow Christ followers to properly interpret sacred texts (e.g. 10.12). Barnabas then argues that fleshly circumcision has been totally abolished (Barn. 9.4).[4] The only circumcision that seems to be of any significance is Abraham's circumcising of his household (Gen 17:23), which Barnabas takes to be the 318 men mentioned in Gen 14:14 (Barn. 9.8). The

2 For a detailed analysis of Barnabas's exegetical strategy in relation to the Sabbath, fasting, kashrut, and the temple see Rothschild, "Soteriology," 569–73. On Barnabas's polemic against the temple in various parts of the text in addition to 16.1 see Martin B. Shukster and Peter Richardson, "Temple and *Bet Ha-midrash* in the Epistle of Barnabas," in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity. Volume 2: Separation and Polemic*, vol. 2, ed. Stephen G. Wilson (Waterloo, ON, 1986), 17–31.

3 Whether the author of Barnabas was a man or a woman cannot be discerned. Here I follow the pseudonymous attribution of the letter with Barnabas, Paul's fellow co-worker, by identifying him with the masculine pronoun. On whether Barnabas's remarks on circumcision are anti-Jewish see the comments of Rothschild ("Epistle of Barnabas and Secession through Allegory," in *New Essays on the Apostolic Fathers* [Tübingen, 2017], 191–212 at 204) who argues that in light of the author's reclamation of Abraham in 9:7–9, one should consider this an intra-Jewish dialogue instead.

4 Among the ancient MSS we have, the text of Barn. 9.4 is relatively stable. For a helpful collation of many of the major MSS containing Barn. 9.1–6 in relation to one another, see Robert A. Kraft, "An Unnoticed Papyrus Fragment of Barnabas," *VChr* 21 (1967): 150–163 at 154–155. For Barn. 9.4 there are two significant variants in the Greek witnesses related to the phrase ὅτι ἄγγελος πονηρὸς ἐσόφιζεν αὐτούς (text from Prigent and Kraft, *Épître de Barnabé*, 144.). Firstly, in S (Codex Sinaiticus) the initial text records ἔσφαξεν, while its correction S^2 (7th century) has corrected it to ἐσόφιζεν present in the majority of witnesses (PSI VII 757r [P], Codex Hierosolymitanus [H], and the thirteen manuscripts where Barn. 5.7–21.9 has been fused with the Epistle of Polycarp [G]). Although it is clearly the *lectio difficilior*, the verb σφάζω ("to slay, slaughter") makes little sense in the context of Barnabas's discussion. The lexical semantics of σφάζω can have a connection with slaying someone with a knife (LSJ s.v. σφάζω II 2), and circumcision was indeed a type of "cutting" as a result of a knife, but it is unclear whether there is any discernible connection between the two in Barnabas's argument. The verb σοφίζω is to be preferred, even if the notion is striking conceptually in the context of ancient Judaism and, to a certain extent, early Christian polemic against circumcision. Although it regularly means "to make wise" (cf. Barn. 5.3) σοφίζω here connotes sophistry, trickery, and deception at the hands of someone else (e.g. Philo, *Mut.* 240; Josephus, *B.J.* 4.103). The second important variant in this text is discussed in section 3 below.

significance of this circumcision is not as a seal of the covenant (cf. Barn. 9.6; Gen 17:11), but as a numerical prefiguration of the words "Jesus" and the "cross."[5]

Barnabas's concern is not the initial use of circumcision. After all, he works at length to justify the circumcision of Abraham as a prefiguration of Christ's coming.[6] Rather, Barnabas is concerned that the ritual of circumcision is still being practiced even though God had abolished it in favour of heart circumcision. The continued practice of circumcision among Jews is, to Barnabas, the result of disobedience because they follow the word of an evil angel and not the command of God.[7]

3 Searching for the Identity of Barnabas's ἄγγελος πονηρός

The identity of the ἄγγελος πονηρός has long puzzled interpreters. The syntagm ἄγγελος πονηρός is unique to Barnabas and only reappears in the seventh century tale *Barlaam and Ioasaph*.[8] The mention of multiple evil ἄγγελοι can be found in the LXX (e.g. Ps 77:49 [cited by Philo, *Gig*. 17; Origen, *Cels* 8.32, etc.];

5 As Prostmeier, *Barnabasbrief*, 367, puts it, "Die Beschneidung am Fleisch war von Anfang an nicht Siegel für Gottes Heilszusicherung, sondern prophetisches Zeichen für die Kirche." It is not entirely clear that Barnabas is using *gematria* in his interpretation of 318 as referring to "Jesus" and "cross" numerically. See Reidar Hvalvik, "Barnabas 9.7–9 and the Author's Supposed Use of Gematria," *NTS* 33 (1987): 276–282; Ferdinand R. Prostmeier, "Antijudaismus im Rahmen christlicher Hermeneutik: Zum Streit über christliche Identität in der Alten Kirche. Notizen zum Barnabasbrief," *ZAC* 6 (2002): 38–58 at 52. Clare Rothschild has argued that the primary purpose of Barnabas is to showcase his allegorical approach to Jewish scriptures: "Epistle of Barnabas and Secession through Allegory."

6 Interpreters seem to understand the evil angel as responsible for circumcision from the very beginning. Cf. James Carleton Paget, "Barnabas 9:4: A Peculiar Verse on Circumcision," *VChr* 45 (1991): 242–254 at 250; Adolf Hilgenfeld, *Die Apostolischen Väter: Untersuchungen über Inhalt und Ursprung der unter ihrem Namen erhaltenen Schriften* (Halle, 1853), 22, n.19.

7 If Rothschild is correct about Barnabas's opponents, that they are indeed Christian (see n.1 above), then the author's strategy to de-legitimise the literal application of circumcision may be an indication that the opponents were an early Christian group like the Ebionites (see Irenaeus, *Haer* 1.26.2).

8 The text is a Christianised version of the story of Buddha through the legendary martyrs and saints Barlaam and Joasaph by an anonymous author and later attributed to John of Damascene (*Barlaam and Ioasaph* 160). For the Greek text and translation see G.R. Woodward and Harold Mattingly, trans., *Barlaam and Iaosaph* (Cambridge, MA, 1914), 270. A search through the TLG corpus shows that πονηρός ἄγγελος, the expression with the adjective in front of the substantive rather than after as in Barn 9.4, appears in Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 105.6) and a fragment by Didymus the Blind on the Psalms and then in the 8/9th century work the *Vita Stephani iunioris* by Stephanus Diaconus. Justin's mention of a πονηρός ἄγγελος relates to the taking of human souls and not to circumcision.

Isa 30:4 [Justin, *Dial.* 79.3]). However, the ἄγγελοι πονηροί in Ps 77:49 are sent by God to inflict his wrath upon Egypt through the plagues. It is unclear whether Barnabas means to invoke this motif of God using evil angels to outwork his wrath (cf. Deut 32:24), especially if he wants to distance God from the continued practice of physical circumcision in the first place. We are thus left with only clues from the context of Barn. 9.4 to understand to whom this ἄγγελος πονηρός refers.

Given that circumcision was an important practice for ancient Jewish men, no clear literary source has been found connecting an evil angel with Jewish circumcision. James Rhodes suggested that the connection between circumcision and an evil angel may stem from the book of Jubilees' reformulation of Exod 4:24–26, when YHWH attempts to kill Moses but stops once Zipporah circumcises their son. Jub. 48:2–3 alludes to the Exodus text by specifying that it was not YHWH but the malevolent spirit named Mastema who attempted to kill him: "…once Mastema enters the legend, it would be possible to conclude that the circumcision of Moses' son had the practical effect of placating (rather than repelling) an 'evil angel.' If circumcision were intended to be understood literally, why, one might ask, should the lawgiver himself have left his son uncircumcised?"[9] On balance, placating an evil angel is not the same as being "tricked" (σοφίζω, Barn. 9.4). While it is strange that Moses has not yet circumcised his son, it may have simply been due to the circumstances of travel, as the generation of Israelites born while in the wilderness were not circumcised either (Josh 5:5).[10] Additionally, the Jubilees passage does not even mention circumcision. This conjecture, while tantalising, unfortunately provides no convincing connection between Barn 9.4 and Jub 48:2–3.

Other scholars have argued that Barnabas must have synthesised the idea himself. Some focus on Barnabas's influences and how they might be synthesised to construe circumcision as a product of the demonic.[11] Hans Windisch,

9 James N. Rhodes, *The Epistle of Barnabas and the Deuteronomic Tradition: Polemics, Paraenesis, and the Legacy of the Golden-Calf Incident* (Tübingen, 2004), 103, n.47.

10 One of the most convincing readings of Exod 4:24–26 is William H. Propp, "That Bloody Bridegroom (Exodus IV 24–26)," *VT* 43 (1993): 495–518 drawing in particular on Hans Kosmala, "The 'Bloody Husband'," *VT* 12 (1962): 14–28. See also the recent fascinating (and I think correct) analysis of B. Embry, "The Endangerment of Moses: Towards a New Reading of Exodus 4:24–26," *VT* 60 (2010): 177–196.

11 Martin argues that "demon" should not be retrojected on to Jewish texts, which make a distinction between "evil spirits" or "evil angels" and the early Christian concept of fallen angels as demons. Dale B. Martin, "When Did Angels Become Demons?" *JBL* 129 (2010): 657–677 at 668. However, as Anders Klostergaard Petersen has argued ("The Notion of Demon: Open Questions to a Diffuse Concept," in *Die Dämonen: Die Dämonologie der*

while mentioning that such an idea "comes close to Gnostic ideas" ("dicht an gnostische Vorstellungen heran"), argued that such an idea was rooted in Enochic angel traditions, Jewish traditions about angels along with their involvement in the giving of the law, and early Christian apologetic against the demonic origins of pagan myths, cults, and philosophy.[12] James Carleton Paget follows Windisch, arguing that Barnabas is to be credited with fusing different traditions from Judaism and early Christianity in order to create the novelty that is Barn. 9.4.[13]

Reidar Hvalvik argues that Barnabas did not attribute circumcision to an evil angel at all and that his argument has been misunderstood by interpreters:

> What is at stake for *Barnabas* is that Jews have disobeyed God's commandment concerning circumcision, that is circumcision of the heart. And this disobedience is due to the fact that they were deluded by an evil angel. *Barnabas* would never have attributed a word of Scripture to an evil power; but even God's word may be misunderstood – as it has been by the Jews.[14]

While it is true that Barnabas deals with the scriptural interpretation of circumcision's present relevance and the problem of its continued practice by influence of an evil angel, Hvalvik still misses the thrust of Barnabas's argument. Barnabas's point is not that the Jews have disobeyed by rejecting heart circumcision, but rather, that they have continued circumcising in the flesh rather than *abandoning* it for heart circumcision.

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israelitisch-jüdischen und frühchristlichen Literatur im Kontext ihrer Umwelt; Armin Lange, Hermann Lichtenberger, and K.F. Diethard Römheld [Tübingen, 2003], 23–39, here at 39) the utility of the term "demon" as a "general religio-historical category that makes it possible to study notions of demons in contexts in which the concept itself does not occur."

12 Hans Windisch, *Die Apostolischen Väter III. Der Barnabasbrief* (Tübingen, 1920), 352. It is not the case that Windisch ignores ancient Jewish angelology in favour of "Gnostic/Marcionite influence." *pace* Carleton Paget, "Barnabas 9:4," 246.

13 Carleton Paget, "Barnabas 9:4," 250. Carleton Paget's analysis, especially of the ancient Jewish and early Christian angelic traditions, is very helpful for illuminating the theological concatenations that underlie Barnabas's conception of the origins of circumcision for the Jews.

14 Reidar Hvalvik, *The Struggle for Scripture: The Purpose of the Epistle of Barnabas and Jewish-Christian Competition in the Second Century* (Tübingen, 1996), 125.

4 Barnabas's ἄγγελος πονηρός as Satan

One possible identity of the ἄγγελος πονηρός that scholars have gestured toward but not provided evidence for is Satan. It is obvious that the ἄγγελος πονηρός has some demonic connection to Satan, since it presides over the angels and way of darkness (18.1). Although he does not explicitly say Barnabas refers to Satan in 9.4, Carleton Paget gestured towards this connection, focusing on the inherent dualistic framework of Barnabas: "Hence it seems reasonable to argue that the use of πονηρός ἄγγελος to describe the figure who deceives the Jews into implementing circumcision literally, is wholly in keeping with B.'s generally dualistic view that sees evil personified in an evil figure."[15] Ferdinand Prostmeier argued that the ἄγγελος πονηρός was "materially parallel" ("sachlich parallel") with the various epithets used to describe the devil in Barnabas (i.e. ὁ πονηρός, ὁ ἄρχων, and ὁ μέλας).[16] More recently, Geza Vermes understood the ἄγγελος πονηρός not just to be associated with Satan, but to refer to Satan itself. On Barnabas' conception of circumcision in 9.4, Vermes writes: "As for circumcision, a major issue in Gentile Christianity of Pauline colouring, its understanding as the severance of the foreskin is a misconception implanted in the mind of the Jews by the evil angel *Satan*."[17] However, it was Adolf Hilgenfeld more than a hundred and fifty years ago who noted that, "According to our author, the devil had apparently single-handedly introduced physical circumcision among the Jews straight from the beginning" ("Allein offenbar hat der Teufel nach unserem Verfasser gleich anfangs die leibliche Beschneidung bei den Juden eingeführt").[18] None of these scholars provide textual evidence to confirm whether the ἄγγελος πονηρός does, in fact, refer to Satan. Nevertheless, a consideration of the internal evidence from Barnabas shows that there is implicit textual support for the idea that the ἄγγελος πονηρός refers to the devil.

One of angles that Barnabas deploys to argue against the continuous practice of circumcision is the anticipated objection from his readers that physical circumcision was "given as a seal," an allusion to Gen 17:11 (Barn. 9.6). Barnabas's counterargument is that the Jewish people were not the only ones who were circumcised. In 9.6 he mentions specifically Syrians, Arabs, Egyptians, "and all the priests of the idols" (πάντες οἱ ἱερεῖς τῶν εἰδώλων) as those who also practised circumcision. Barnabas asks, if circumcision was a seal of the covenant with God, then are the pagan nations who practice circumcision also a part of

15 Carleton Paget, "Barnabas 9:4," 250.
16 Prostmeier, *Der Barnabasbrief*, 359–60, 360–1.
17 Geza Vermes, *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea* (New Haven, CN, 2012), 150.
18 Hilgenfeld, *Die Apostolischen Väter*, 22, n.19.

that covenant? Certainly not. The anticipated answer is that pagan idolators are not part of the covenant, and therefore circumcision, even Jewish circumcision, cannot be a seal of God's covenant.

The connection that Barnabas makes in 9.6 between circumcision and the idolatry of the nations is important. For many early Christians, the cults of pagan nations were ruled by demons. The idols of nations were considered demons among early Christians (e.g. 1 Cor 10:20; Justin, *Dial.* 55, 73; Tatian, *Or. Graec.* 13.2–3; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 26.1–2; Tertullian, *Apol.* 23.11).[19] This has precedence in both ancient Greek traditions and early Judaism. Some ancient Greek traditions presented demons as being appointed in order to rule justly over cities instead of human kings (e.g. Plato, *Leg*. 713c–d). The LXX Deut 4:19–20 and 32:8–9 understood angels of God (ἄγγελοι θεοῦ) as being assigned to the nations (cf. Sir 17:17).[20] And in Jub 15:31–32, a re-reading of Deut 32:8–9, the angel of God's presence tells Moses about how God has assigned "spirits" to rule over other peoples to lead them astray, but over Israel he has assigned "no angel or spirit" but rules over it himself.[21] Ancient Jews even associated the gods/idols of other nations with the language of "demons" (LXX Deut 32:17; Ps 96:5; 105:37; 4Q243 Frag 13, l. 2; 1 Cor 10:20). Barnabas himself makes a connection between idols and demons in his metaphor of the believer's heart as a temple in 16.7.

Circumcision is not the only place where Barnabas implies a connection between Jewish ritual and idolatry. In his retelling of the giving of the law of Moses at Sinai, Barnabas makes sure to emphasise that the Jewish covenant ended before it could start because of idolatry (4.8). Twice Barnabas recounts God's urge for Moses to go down to the Israelites (Ex 32:7–8), once in 4.8 and then again in 14.3. Although both emphasise the Israelite turn to idolatry, in 14.3 Barnabas notes that the Israelites "have made for themselves molten images *again*" (ἐποίησαν ἑαυτοῖς πάλιν χωνεύματα). The inclusion of πάλιν (which is not present in LXX 32:7–8), combined with fact that they are a people whom God

19 Sonja Gayle Anderson, "Idol Talk: The Discourse of False Worship in the Early Christian World," PhD Dissertation (Yale University, 2016), 62–67.

20 A copy of Deut 32:7–8 at Qumran (4Q37 Deuteronomy^{j}) reads "sons of God" (בני אלוהים), a well-known title for angels. Ancient Israelites may have viewed the "sons" over the nations as other gods (see Michael S. Heiser, "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible," *BBR* 18 [2008]: 1–30).

21 Hannah understands the reason for their being led astray is because of their rebellion at the Tower of Babel. Darrell D. Hannah, "Guardian Angels and Angelic National Patrons in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity," in *Angels: The Concept of Celestial Beings – Origins, Development and Reception*, eds Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, and Karin Schöpflin (Berlin and New York, 2007), 413–436 at 419.

"brought out of Egypt" (ὃν ἐξήγαγες ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου, in both 4.8 and 14.3), imply that they had reverted to Egyptian idols and their demonic practices. Since it was well-known that ancient Egyptians practiced circumcision, no doubt one might easily assume circumcision as a part of their "idolatrous rituals".

Unsurprisingly, idolatry is also connected with Satan in 20.1. But if circumcision is associated with idolatry and idolatry with demons, then Satan, as the ruler of evil angels (18.1), is therefore associated with circumcision. In Barnabas, there is an implicit constellation of ideas that connects Satan, demons, pagan idolatry, and the practice of circumcision. In 9.6, Barnabas implies that since the cults which utilise circumcision also serve idols, and idols are connected to demons, circumcision is thus a product of satanic activity.

Elsewhere in Barnabas, the devil is associated with Jewish customs the author no longer views as exegetically defendable. For example, in the final verse of chapter 2, Barnabas warns readers to be careful so that the evil one does not "make a deceptive infiltration" among them and "fling" them "away from their life" (ἵνα μὴ ὁ πονηρὸς παρείσδυσιν πλάνης ποιήσας ἐν ἡμῖν ἐκσφενδονήσῃ ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν). The abolition (καταργέω, cf. 9.4) of sacrifices and burnt offerings (2.4, 6) in favour of the spiritual offering of a "broken heart" (2.10) is the specific way of life that Barnabas now commands is solely important. If the commands of God involve the discontinuation of temples offerings, then conversely, the way of the evil one is the continuation of sacrifices and burnt offerings.

Additionally, in 16.1–2, Barnabas associates the Jerusalem temple of "the suffering ones" (οἱ ταλαίπωροι), a reference to the Jewish people, with idolatrous temples of the nations (σχεδὸν γὰρ ὡς τὰ ἔθνη). Later in 16.7, Barnabas argues that a corrupt heart was "like a temple actually built from hands" (ὡς ἀληθῶς οἰκοδομητὸς ναὸς διὰ χειρός) and that it was a place of idolatry and demons. The implication is that human temples are also places of idolatry and demons. As mentioned already, in Barnabas, idolatry and demons are associated with Satan (18.1; 20.1). In light of Barnabas's link between the devil and the Jewish temple and sacrifices, it is not difficult therefore to see the association between the devil and circumcision in 9.4.

Another piece of evidence that suggests the ἄγγελος πονηρός is Satan is the fact that the only other figure in Barnabas to which the adjective πονηρός is attributed refers to the devil (2.10, 4.13, 21.3).[22] Although these passages do not mention Satan explicitly, there was already an established use of the articular

22 Carleton Paget, "Barnabas 9:4," 250. The use of πονηρός in 4.5 may not apply because it is a quotation of Daniel 7:7–8. In 21.3, the expression τῷ πονηρῷ could be both neuter (referring to evil more broadly) or masculine (the Evil One, i.e. Satan, cf. 1 John 5:19).

πονηρός to refer to him among early Christian texts (Matt 5:37; 6:13; 13:19, 38; Eph 6:16; 2 Thess 3:3; John 17:15; 1 John 2:13, 14; 3:12; 5:19).[23] An early reception of Barnabas' text affirms taking πονηρός in 9.4 as a reference to Satan. The fourth century papyrus PSI VII 757r uniquely reads ὁ πονηρός (ο ṗνηρος) for 9.4 (line 7) rather than the anarthrous form found in the majority of other Greek witnesses (S H G). As though the referent ἄγγελος πονηρός was not cryptic enough, the addition of the article points to one specific unidentified angelic figure: ἄγγελος ὁ πονηρός.[24] In this construction ὁ πονηρός is in apposition to ἄγγελος and acts substantivally, with the phrase being translated as, "an angel, the evil one." The reading in PSI VII 757r is likely an assimilation to other articular instances of πονηρός in Barnabas (e.g. 2.10; 21.3), clarifying the evil angel as Satan, and thus is probably not the initial reading.[25] Nevertheless, it is an indication that some of our earliest readers understood the ἄγγελος πονηρός in 9.4 to be Satan.[26]

If the author had intended ἄγγελος πονηρός in 9.4 to be understood as the devil then why is it not articular in the same way as 2.10, 4.13, and 21.3? On the one hand, the author of Barnabas does not always consistently render key titles with the definite article. For example, "the Lord" (κύριος) is both frequently anarthrous (1.1, 3, 4, etc.) as well as articular (4.12; 5.1, etc.). Additionally, even if one understands ἄγγελος πονηρός to simply be an unnamed evil angel, for Barnabas, angels who are not under the authority of God are under the aegis of Satan (18.1), and so ultimately, Satan is still responsible.

There is one final piece of information, often overlooked by interpreters but recently brought to light by Clare Rothschild, that further connects Satan

23 On the solidification of Satan as the divine opponent of God in the second century see Jan Dochhorn, "Der Sturz des Teufels in der Urzeit: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Skizze zu einem Motiv frühjüdischer und frühchristlicher Theologie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Luzifermythos," *ZTK* 109 (2012): 3–47.

24 Although PSI VII 757r lacks ἄγγελος due to lacunae it may be presumed. Due to its attestation in all other witnesses, as well as the estimated letter spacing on the papyri, Kraft sees no problem assuming the presence of ἄγγελος. See Kraft, "An Unnoticed Papyrus," 159, 162.

25 This assimilation also suggests that the initial text present in all other Greek witnesses is ἄγγελος πονηρός.

26 The Latin versional evidence does not help much in this regard. The principle ninth century Latin witness of Barnabas L or VL 66 (Corbey St. James in St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Q.v.I.39), which is thought to preserve a 4th century text, reads *angelus nequam* (a/the vile angel). See Hugo Ménard, *Sancti Barnabae Apostoli* (*ut fertur*) *Epistola Catholica* (Paris, 1645), 32; Joseph Michael Heer, *Die Versio Latina des Barnabasbriefes und ihr Verhältnis zur altlateinischen Bibel* (Freiburg i. Br., 1908), 56. Elsewhere *nequam* is used to translate πονηρός (extant for 2.10 and 4.13). The absence of definite articles, in Latin, however, would have made its reference ambiguous. Like the repetition of πονηρός, a reader might have associated *nequam* specifically with the devil.

to the practice of circumcision. One of the strange epithets used to describe Satan in Barnabas is "the black one" (ὁ μέλας) which appears in both 4.9 and 20.1. Recently, Rothschild has argued that the colourisation of black peoples, such as "Ethiopians" is intentionally mapped on to Satan in Barnabas.[27] An "Ethiopian" was, as Rothschild notes, "a somatic category" that stereotypically referred to a "variety of sub-Saharan people groups."[28]

This category became theologically exacerbated in early Christianity by writers like Origen, Jerome and Didymus the "Seeing."[29] Origen, for example, commenting on the claim in Song of Songs 1:5 that the speaker (whom he interprets to be the Bride of Christ) is black (OG: μέλαινά εἰμι), explains why she is this way: "I am that Ethiopian I am black indeed by reason of my lowly origin; but I am beautiful through penitence and faith" (*Comm. Cant* 2.1).[30] This same point is later affirmed in relation to the individual believer: "It can be said also of each individual soul that turns to repentance after many sins, that she is black by reason of the sins, but beautiful through her repentance and the fruits of her repentance."[31] Commenting on LXX Ps 86:4, Jerome similarly associates the blackness of "Ethiopians" with sin:

> At one time we were Ethiopians in our vices and sins. How so? Because our sins had blackened us. But afterwards we heard the words: "Wash yourselves clean!" And we said: "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps 50.9). We are Ethiopians, therefore, who have been transformed from blackness into whiteness.
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> *Tract. Ps.* 18.[32]

27 Clare K. Rothschild, "Ethiopianising the Devil: ὁ μέλας in Barnabas 4," *NTS* 65 (2019): 223–245.

28 Rothschild, "Ethiopianising the Devil," 226.

29 In spite of his disability (according to Palladius: *ophthalmia*), Didymus was a highly learned and competent layman, an expert in many different fields, and a teacher at the theological school in Alexandria (appointed by Athanasius) where he taught students such as Jerome, Rufinus of Aquileia, and Palladius. See D.P.M. Weerakkody, "Didymus the Blind," in *Encyclopedia of Disability: Volume 1*, ed. Gary L. Albrecht (Thousand Oaks, CA, 2006), 401. In light of his accomplishments, it is fitting that Jerome frequently called him "Didymus the Seeing" instead of the pejorative Didymus the Blind. Frances M. Young and Andrew Teal, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, 2010), 93.

30 Translation from R.P. Lawson, *Origen. The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies* (Westminster, 1957), 93.

31 Lawson, *Origen. The Song of Songs*, 106.

32 Translation from Hermigild Dressler, *Jerome. The Homilies of Saint Jerome* (*1–59 on the Psalms*) (Washington, DC, 1964), 140.

As Rothschild notes, Didymus of Alexandria takes this one step further. Not only is the devil black because of "dark ignorance and malice" but he argues that "Ethiopian peoples are descendants of the devil, thus why they are black, as indicated in the book of repentance called *Shepherd* and in the *Epistle of* Barnabas" (Comm. *Zach* 9).[33] As one of the earliest readers of Barnabas, Didymus explicitly connects ὁ μέλας to the blackness of the devil.[34] Even though Didymus is the only author to explicitly read ὁ μέλας in connection the blackness of "Ethiopians," nevertheless, the wider valence that connected Ethiopian blackness with sin, malice, and vice are congruent with Satan in Barnabas who is evil.

It was well-known that dark-skinned sub-Saharan peoples, like "Ethiopians" and Egyptians in the ancient world practised circumcision (Herodotus, *Hist* 2.104). This is something that even Barnabas reinforces in 9.6 when he associates Egyptians with circumcision.[35] Given its Alexandrian provenance, the author would have known this first-hand. If ὁ μέλας is indeed an "Ethiopianising" of Satan in Barnabas, then there is also an implicit connection between Satan and circumcision as well. If circumcision is attached to black bodies, and black bodies are associated with sin and evil, then circumcision

33 Translation from Robert C. Hill, *Didymus the Blind. Commentary on Zechariah* (Washington, DC, 2006), 223.

34 In my view the reception history of Ethiopians being associated with blackness, and especially the evidence of Didymus who makes the connection between Ethiopians and the devil, is more convincing than a number of connections within Barnabas that Rothschild tries to connect ὁ μέλας with the portrayal of Ethiopians in wider Graeco-Roman evidence. Rothschild, "Ethiopianising the Devil," 237–239. The strongest piece of evidence in Rothschild's argument is the explanation that Barn. 2.10 mentions the evil one "hurling" Christians from their life (ἐκσφενδονήσῃ ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν). The verb ἐκσφενδονάω is also used to describe Troglodytes who lived in Ethiopia and were proficient in "slinging" Persian armies (Heliodorus, *Aeth* 9.5.8). However, the analogy between Barn 2.10 and the slinging Troglodytes is not entirely the same; in Barnabas, the Christians themselves (ἡμᾶς!) are flung away, whereas in Heliodorus, slings are used against the Persians.

35 If the author had "Ethiopians" in mind in 9.4 then why does he not also mention them explicitly along with the Syrians, Arabs, and Egyptians in 9.6? As Rothschild argues, the label "Ethiopian" was a stereotype rather than a term with ethnic specificity: "The Greek word αἰθιοπία derives from the verb αἴθειν 'to burn' plus the noun ὤψ 'face, countenance' – hence referring to anyone (irrespective of homeland) with a somatically 'black' appearance." Rothschild, "Ethiopianising the Devil," 226. This explains why authors like Herodotus describe the whole of the country surrounding the Nile river as Ethiopian (*Hist* 2.22). Herodotus even relates Ethiopians and Egyptians because they share black skin (*Hist* 2.104). Because "Ethiopian" was a stereotype for anyone with darker skin, when mentioning Egyptians, the author of Barnabas likely understood such people to be "Ethiopians."

was associated with it too. This, in concert with the other evidence above, suggests that the ἄγγελος πονηρός in 9.4 should be understood as Satan.

5 Conclusion

In *The Letter of Ptolemy to Flora*, some rivals understood the Jewish law to be promulgated by the devil: "For some say [the law] was given by our God and Father but others, taking the direction opposite to theirs, insist that it was given by our adversary the devil, the author of corruption – as, indeed, they ascribe the creation of the world to him, calling him the father and maker of this universe" (in Epiphanius, *Pan.* 33,3,2).[36] James Carleton Paget observed, "[t]hat B[arnabas] has sought refuge in evil agencies makes him in one respect closer to those opponents of Ptolemy who attribute the giving of the law to the Devil."[37] This study confirms that Barnabas is not only proximate with such opponents but actually readily aligns with them.

We have shown that Barnabas places demonic forces under the hegemony of Satan, and that one characteristic of his rule is idolatry, a practice that is facilitated by demons and widespread among nations in the Levant (Egypt, Syria, Arabia). What is also characteristic of these nations, according to Barnabas, is their practice of circumcision. Thus, like the Jewish temple and temple sacrifices, Barnabas associates circumcision with the way of the devil. Early readers of Barnabas, as evidenced by PSI VII 757r understood ἄγγελος πονηρός to refer to Satan. Thanks to the work of Clare Rothschild on the motif of Satan as "the black one," we are able to draw a connection between the "Ethiopianness" of Satan and the well-known practice of circumcision among sub-Saharan black peoples. The initial assertions of Hilgenfeld, Prostmeier, and Vermes are correct. The ἄγγελος πονηρός in Barn 9.4 simply refers to the devil.

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36 Translation from Frank Williams, *The* Panarion *of Epiphanius of Salamis. Book I* (*Sects 1–46*), 2nd Rev. Exp (Leiden, 2009), 216.

37 Carleton Paget, "Barnabas 9:4," 248.