

HERBS AND WILD FRUIT:  
JUDAS MACCABEE AND REFLECTIONS OF  
RECHABITISM IN THE MEDIEVAL GOSPEL OF BARNABAS

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In his pioneering study of traditions surrounding the character of James the Righteous, Robert Eisenman draws attention to the themes of vegetarianism and Temple pollution and to the practice of Jewish zealots retiring to the wilderness for ascetic purification. Eisenman wants to connect these traditions to the “wilderness camps” described in some of the sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls, and he finds the origins of these traditions in the actions of Judas Maccabee who, at the outbreak of the Maccabean revolt, took a band of followers to the wilderness to “live like wild animals in the hills,” as described in the second book of Maccabees:

Judas, called Maccabaeus, however, with about nine others, withdrew into the wilderness, and lived like wild animals in the hills with his companions, eating nothing but wild plants to avoid contracting defilement.<sup>1</sup>

The cause of this withdrawal to the wilderness is the corruption of the Temple and therefore the corruption of sacrificial and other meat. Eisenman argues that this establishes a pattern for Jewish rebels dismayed by foreign control of the Temple and Priesthood; to prepare themselves for battle they withdraw to the wilderness to harden and purify themselves on wild (i.e. God-given) foods. Eisenman finds traces of this phenomenon throughout surviving texts. In particular, he regards this as the source of canonical depictions of John of Baptist—a wilderness dweller who lives on wild foods—and of reports that James the Righteous was a vegetarian. He then wants to link this to the persistence of Rechabitisim as a nationalist, rebel ideology “demanding a Priesthood of greater purity devoid of pollution by foreigners.”<sup>2</sup> He admits that “it is difficult to know whether there were any actual

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Maccabees 5:27

<sup>2</sup> Eisenman Robert. *James the Brother of Jesus* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. 265.

'Rechabites' as such left in the Second Temple period" but he argues that the phenomenon of Rechabitism was still alive even if the actual Rechabites were not, and he points out that Eusebius' source Hegesippus was using the term 'Rechabite' to describe James and his followers. Others have James as a "Nazarite" which Eisenman wants to regard as parallel terminology. There are many often complex variations on the theme in our sources — the Essenes, Josephus' portrait of Banus, various feral prophets described by Josephus, descriptions of "Rechabite" priests in the family of Jesus, and so on — but Eisenman sees them all as kindred expressions of the same movement that has the Maccabean uprising and the methods of Judas Maccabee and his followers as its prototype.

There are many interesting parallels to Eisenman's analysis of early texts in a very late text, the medieval Gospel of Barnabas. While the medieval Barnabas might well be regarded as the most apocryphal of all apocrypha, it is nevertheless a fascinating work of a pronounced "Jamesean" character.<sup>3</sup> It presents a remarkable retelling of the ministry of the Jewish Jesus that appears full of the Ebionitic or "Jewish-Christian" motifs that are at the core of Eisenman's analysis of James. Eisenman, for instance, identifies the "walking in the Law" terminology and the idea of a rigorous adherence to the Law in early texts as a keynote of the popular, nationalist ideology agitating for a purified Temple and Priesthood after the Maccabean<sup>4</sup> model. In Barnabas we have a picture of Jesus as "a prophet, whom [God] will send to the people of Israel in order that they may walk in his laws,"<sup>5</sup> one sent "in order that he may convert Judah to his heart, and that Israel may walk in the Law"<sup>6</sup> and where this is the popular ideology: "great was the multitude of them that returned to their heart for to walk in the Law of God."<sup>7</sup> The medieval Barnabas is a text in which we meet a very "Jamesean" Jesus, even to the point where we suspect that the Barnabas Jesus is, in some episodes, a recasting of an earlier,

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<sup>3</sup> See the author's article "The Temptation in the Wilderness in the Medieval Gospel of Barnabas," *JHC* 6/1 (Spring 2000), for an example of its "Jamesean" character.

<sup>4</sup> I will use the word "Maccabean" in preference to "Hasmonean" throughout this article to avoid confusion (and to side-step the complexities that come with the latter). It is specifically Judas Maccabee's revolt that is the model.

<sup>5</sup>Ch. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Ch. 2.

<sup>7</sup>Ch. 14.

underlying portrait of James. We find Jesus addressing the crowds from the pinnacle of the Temple in exactly the fashion James is described as having done,<sup>8</sup> and we find Jesus playing the Jamesean role of Protector of the City. In this it actually squares with Eisenman's analysis precisely. In fact, many of the themes Eisenman pursues in what can only be described as the Gordean Knot of early sources, take a more transparent shape in this strange medieval gospel. One section in particular stands out: it shows a very James-like Jesus but it has an explicit connection with Maccabees. In an episode that appears to have no canonical parallel, set "at the stones of Joshua" by the Jordan where the ancient Israelites "crossed dry shod," Jesus speaks to the people and they in turn:

prayed Jesus, every one, that he would pray for the safety of the holy city, that our God in his anger should not give it over to be trodden down of the nations.<sup>9</sup>

Guardian of the Holy City is a Jamesean motif; it fits into the over-all pattern of Barnabas' depiction of a very James-like, Ebionitic Jesus upon whom the safety of the city depends. In some of our sources the prayers of James preserve Jerusalem from the Romans; when James is executed God withdraws His favour and the city is thereafter doomed. But this motif in Barnabas is, at the same time, a picture of the people appealing to *Judas Maccabee* to stand up to the "nations" and guard the city. This Jamesean portrait has a Maccabean prototype. This is confirmed beyond any doubt by the phrase "trodden down of the nations" which comes from the description of the beginning of the Maccabean revolt not in the second but the *first* Book of Maccabees. The full context makes this even more obvious. The multitude that had assembled at the stones of Joshua to hear Barnabas' Jesus were the people of Jerusalem:

Then everyone, small and great, went out from the city to see Jesus, so that the city was left empty, for the women [carried] their children in their arms, and forgot to take food to eat.

In the Biblical account—although one has to misread it slightly<sup>10</sup>—it was *Judas Maccabee* who emptied Jerusalem:

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<sup>8</sup>See chs. 12 and 126. I have elsewhere argued that these chapters may contain reflections of the now-lost "Ascents of James."

<sup>9</sup> Ch. 95.

Judas and his brothers saw that the situation was going from bad to worse... They mustered their people to prepare for war, and to offer prayer and implore compassion and mercy. Jerusalem was left uninhabited like a desert; there was none left to go in or out, of all her children. The sanctuary was trodden under foot with men of an alien race in the Citadel... After mustering they made their way to Mizpah...<sup>11</sup>

There can be no doubt that these non-canonical episodes in the ministry of Jesus in the medieval Barnabas are alluding to this account of the outbreak of the Maccabean revolt. In chapter 91 of the Italian manuscript—if more explicit proof is needed—we are in fact informed of a “sedition” at “Mispeh,” an incontestable reference to the Maccabean revolt from the passage in 1 Maccabees just quoted.<sup>12</sup> Barnabas is clearly presenting his Jesus as Judas Maccabee—his Jesus is a popular leader who empties the city. Just as clearly, the depiction of the people praying to Jesus to save the Holy City is an appeal to Jesus as a Judas Maccabee figure, even if, on the face of it, it seems another instance of Jesus as James.

There are, in fact, a wealth of allusions throughout the medieval Barnabas to Judas Maccabee and the Maccabean revolt,<sup>13</sup> many of them even more straight-forward than this one. The Gospel of Barnabas is fascinating for the way it presents the Maccabean revolt—with the Jewish war superimposed—as being a dispute about the nature and character of Christ. In the Books of Maccabees the Maccabees secure decrees of friendship and allegiance from the Romans, delivered in plaques of bronze.<sup>14</sup> In the Gospel of Barnabas these become Roman notices on plaques

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<sup>10</sup> Jerusalem is left empty because it is “trodden under foot” by the “nations,” but the misreading evident in Barnabas is natural and understandable; Jerusalem is left empty because Judas mustered the people for war.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Macc. 3:42-46.

<sup>12</sup> The “Mispeh” episode in Barnabas is probably the key to the whole work. It is very complex with many layers of allusion, including allusions to the Roman Jewish War. In the first instance, though, “Mispeh” comes from 1 Maccabees. Leaving aside Modein and the stance taken by Matthias, it is at Mispeh “opposite Jerusalem” that the Revolt begins.

<sup>13</sup> There are a wealth of allusions to the whole intertestamental period. See, for example, the section on the “Origins of the Pharisees” in chapter 144, or the reference to “Tyre,” the Tobiad stronghold, in chapter 99. The Judas Maccabee theme explored in this article needs to be considered in a wider study of the work’s intertestamental allusions.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Macc. 8:21 sq.

of copper forbidding that anyone should create “sedition” about Jesus.<sup>15</sup> The whole “Jewish problem” from the Maccabean revolt through to the fall of the Temple is presented as a dispute about Jesus, and the Jesus character is often transparently based upon the character of Judas Maccabee. The author’s militant, nationalistic Jesus, sent by God to lead the people to “walk in His Law” is a hero of the Judas Maccabee type. The depiction of him speaking from the stones of Joshua is an especially interesting part of this characterization; the Jesus/Judas Maccabee hero is presented as a Joshua revidus, an incarnation of the archetypal military leader. One wonders if this unusual configuration — Judas as Joshua as Jesus — could shed any light upon the problem of how the Christian hero happens to be the namesake of Joshua? An appellation with military and nationalistic implications like “Joshua” hardly suits the “turn the other cheek” and Gentile-friendly Jesus of the canonical gospels, but it suits a hero like the Barnabas Jesus, modelled on Judas Maccabee. There are many other sections where we meet the Barnabas Jesus in this military role. Throughout the work Jesus is uncompromising. He upholds circumcision and food laws. He speaks for the people and against the authorities (who collaborate with foreigners). In a spectacular transmutation of the canonical ‘Expulsion of the Merchants’ story Barnabas has Jesus expelling the “*Roman soldiers*” from the Temple, and in fact from the *whole land*, repeating the heroic deeds of Judas Maccabee, cleansing the Temple and expelling the foreigners.

[The Roman soldiers] were fain to stretch forth their hands against Jesus. Then Jesus said: “Adonai Sabaoth!” Whereupon straightway the soldiers were rolled out of the Temple as one rolls casks of wood when they are washed to refill them with wine; insomuch that now their head and now their feet struck the ground, and that without any one touching them. And they were so affrighted and fled in such wise that they were never more seen in Judea.

This is not a portrait of Jesus as James. There is no other hero this Temple-cleansing Jesus could be based upon but Judas Maccabee.<sup>16</sup> Again we have some textual confirmation. In the

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<sup>15</sup> Ch. 98.

<sup>16</sup> The only other possibility is Bar Kochbah, but by then there was no Temple to be cleansed. I cannot detect any allusions to Bar Kochbah in the Gospel of Barnabas.

Barnabean 'Expulsion' the "Roman soldiery" and "Priests and scribes" of the Temple are characterized by Jesus as "robbers";<sup>17</sup> a few episodes later we are told a story of a widow who lost her son when the "Syrian robbers" invaded Judea.<sup>18</sup> Once more, there can be no question that our author, while writing about Jesus and the Romans, is looking to Judas Maccabee and the Syrians. The characterization of Jesus wielding power by virtue of the Divine Name is consistent with the Jewish portrayals familiar to us from such works as the *Toledoth Yeshu*, but those works place Jesus in the period of Alexander Janneus; the Gospel of Barnabas is looking further back to the Maccabean revolt.

The full extent of the Maccabean material in Barnabas emerges when we remember that it is important, as Eisenman stresses, to read *both* accounts of the Maccabean revolt, the one in the First Book of Maccabees and the other in the Second, and to appreciate their differences. For understanding the Barnabas narrative it is important to appreciate that the author (or his source) has evidently read both and *collapsed the two together*; the Judas Maccabee he has based his Jesus character upon both rouses the people *en masse* as in 1 Maccabees, and retreats into the wilderness as in 2 Maccabees. The underlying Judas Maccabee in Barnabas is a mixture of these two portraits.<sup>19</sup> This is certainly the case in the Stones of Joshua/Jordan passages. In 1 Maccabees Judas' revolt begins with the mustering of the people and the assembly at Mizpah. From this Barnabas gets his "sedition at Mispah" and the idea of Jerusalem emptying to follow Jesus. But the idea that the people leave Jerusalem and *go to the Jordan* is based upon the account of Judas Maccabee withdrawing into the wilderness at the outset of the revolt in 2 Maccabees. Confirmation of this comes in the form of the

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<sup>17</sup> Ch. 153. There is an interesting interchange. Having expelled the soldiers from the Temple the Priests declare that Jesus has "the wisdom of Baal and Ashtaroth" for having such power. Jesus explains his actions by declaring that the world is full of the sin of theft. A scribe objects that "now, by the grace of God, there are but few robbers, and they cannot show themselves but they are immediately hanged by the soldiery." Jesus explains that the type of robbery he means is robbing God of His honour.

<sup>18</sup> See ch. 188: "Now the Syrian robbers, having raided the land of Judea, seized the son of a poor widow..."

<sup>19</sup> My conjecture is that the author (or his source) is not drawing upon the Books of Maccabees directly, but rather upon some summary of them or some other account of the Maccabean revolt, itself based on *both* Books of Maccabees. There is evidence too that Josephus' account of the period in *Antiquities* is part of the mix.

intrusion of the motif: *the people had forgotten to bring food to eat*. This is not in 1 Maccabees' account of the emptying of the city. Why has the Barnabas author added it? On the face of it it seems a quirk of the medieval writer; the narrative is littered with explanatory interpolations and other embellishments that seem to belong to the author of the extant text; the author characteristically adds his own adornments at the end of sentences or speeches. But elsewhere in the text it is connected to the idea of *eating herbs and wild fruit*. Most significantly, it appears at the point where the Barnabas text rejoins canonical episodes after the section at the Jordan:

When the greater part of the crowd had departed, there remained about five thousand men, without women and children who being wearied by the journey, having been two days without bread, for that through longing to see Jesus they had forgotten to bring any, whereupon they ate raw herbs therefore they were not able to depart like the others. Then Jesus, when he perceived this, had pity on them, and said to Philip: "Where shall we find bread for them that they perish not of hunger?...."<sup>20</sup>

Thus begins Barnabas' version of the Miracles of the Loaves and Fishes.<sup>21</sup> The crowd that departs here is the *same that emptied from Jerusalem* (forgetting to bring food) and went to Jesus/Judas Maccabee at the Jordan (the Stones of Joshua) — the explicit textual connection is the "women and children" (derived from the "children" in 1 Maccabees.) Now, we are told, about five thousand *men* remain and because they had forgotten to bring any bread, so eager were they to see Jesus, they *ate raw herbs*. The crowd came from 1 Maccabees; the raw herbs motif is coming from 2 Maccabees. Barnabas, in fact, seems based on a somewhat garbled rendering of the two accounts. In this rendering 1. There is a war at Mizpah, 2. Judas Maccabee flees to the Jordan, 3. Jerusalem is emptied when the people follow him, 4. Events happened so quickly they did not have enough provisions, 5. They ate wild herbs. The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes would then be based upon something like 6. Many departed leaving an army of about 5000 (who ate wild herbs.) This account gives a different motive for eating wild herbs than that suggested

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<sup>20</sup> Ch. 98.

<sup>21</sup> Compare Mt 14:13-21, Mk 6:30-44, Lk 9:10-17, Jn 6:1-13.

by 2 Maccabees and advanced by Robert Eisenman, namely for the purposes of purification, but it is nevertheless based in the 2 Maccabees account of the Maccabean wilderness life-style. To reiterate: the crowds that empty from Jerusalem in Barnabas come from 1 Maccabees 3:42-46. It is the same crowds that eat wild herbs in the Barnabas version of the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes. The wild herbs motif is coming from the parallel passage 2 Maccabees, 5:27. Barnabas, that is, has contextualized the canonical story with non-canonical stories derived from accounts of the Maccabean revolt. The implications of this would be that the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes is a story about Judas Maccabee miraculously finding provisions for his followers. Many historically-minded readers of the Gospels have suspected that the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes is some type of allegory about the victualing of an army. But which army? The army of the historical Jesus? In the Gospel of Barnabas the author connects the canonical story with the Maccabean revolt.; it is the army of Judas Maccabee.<sup>22</sup>

The same is also true of stories in which Jesus miraculously provides for a hungry populace: underpinning such stories is a picture of the Maccabean hero feeding the people. Barnabas makes this clear in a non-canonical Harvest Miracle where again we find the “eating raw herbs” motif, and again in the context of hunger.

When morning was come, early, all the men of the city, with the women and children, came to the house where Jesus was with his disciples, and sought him saying: “Sir, have mercy upon us, because this year the worms have eaten the corn, and we shall not receive any bread this year in our land.” Jesus answered: “O what fear is yours! Do you not know that Elijah, the servant of God, while the persecution of Ahab continued for three years, did not see bread, nourishing himself only with herbs and wild fruits? David our father, the prophet of God, ate wild fruits and herbs for two years, [while]being persecuted [by] Saul, [and] twice only did he eat bread.” The men answered: “Sir, they were prophets of God, nourished with spiritual delight, and therefore they endured well; but how shall these

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<sup>22</sup> Judas Maccabee’s men numbered about 6000, according to 2 Macc. 8:16. The idea of “miracles” is implicit in 1 and 2 Maccabees in as much as Judas and his pious followers overcome a far greater force against all odds. In 2 Maccabees especially this is because Judas is God-assisted.



little ones fare?" and they showed him the multitude of their children. Then Jesus had compassion on their misery, and said: "How long is it until harvest?"

Here Barnabas catalogues the Old Testament instances of those holy men who lived on "herbs and wild fruit." This catalogue does not list Judas Maccabee, but it would not if it is a tale *based* on one in which Judas Maccabee is the speaker. (The appeal to Elijah, by the way, recalls the Jamesean Epistle's "Elijah was a human like ourselves....") Here we have a picture of Barnabas' Jesus/Judas Maccabee miraculously providing for the hungry but at the same admonishing his people to the wilderness life-style. Most significantly, he advises this as *a response to persecution*. In the previous passage the 5000 who remained behind had recourse to "wild herbs" out of hunger. Here, although the people are hungry, Jesus—like Judas Maccabee in 2 Maccabees—endorses the wilderness life-style as a response to *persecution*, the response of Elijah under Ahab and David under Saul. The governing idea here, in both episodes, is that Judas Maccabee (as per 2 Maccabees) had an army that lived like "prophets of God, nourished with spiritual delight"—wild foods—but not all his supporters could endure such an austere discipline. Of those that rose up to follow him, emptying Jerusalem (as per 1 Maccabees) only 5000 remained to live on wild herbs (2 Maccabees) and miraculous provision (Miracle of Loaves and Fishes). We meet the common people in the Miracle of the Harvest. When they complain of hardship Jesus/Judas Maccabee calls them to the wilderness life-style as a response to persecution; when they complain that such a life-style is beyond them and their children, Jesus/Judas Maccabee has mercy and provides for them.<sup>23</sup>

Elsewhere in the text we have descriptions of Jesus and his followers not just advocating but actively pursuing the "wilderness life-style" and in every case we can discern Barnabas' debt to the Maccabean tradition. There are numerous occasions where Jesus and the disciples, deviating from the canonical gospels, retreat into the Transjordan wilderness.<sup>24</sup> Usually on such occasions we have long sections of material devoted to Jesus'

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<sup>23</sup> Compare 2 Macc. 8:28

<sup>24</sup> About a third of the whole work consists of sections set "in the wilderness." There are signs that much of this wilderness material belongs to a separate source used by the author.

instruction of his disciples in which he advocates a rigorous ascetic regime, and on several occasions we find them living on “herbs and wild fruits” — like the “prophets of God, nourished with spiritual delight.” Then, in these episodes, when they are duly instructed, Jesus sends his disciples from their Transjordan retreats across the river into Judea and Jerusalem again, to “preach” and “heal” and perform “miracles.”<sup>25</sup> This is very like Eisenman’s descriptions of the Maccabean military tradition with its camps of nationalist ascetics in the Transjordan or Judean wilderness mounting raids<sup>26</sup> into Judea and Jerusalem. The military metaphors in “healings” and “miracles” are especially transparent in Barnabas, and the ideology Jesus instills in his followers is resolutely pro-Law, anti-foreigner in much the same manner as Eisenman’s tradition of Maccabean zeal. The Jesus in Barnabas is far more ascetic than the canonical figure. In many respects he in fact acquires the same ascetic demeanor as the canonical Baptist, or we might go so far as to say he virtually *subsumes* the Baptist character, and John’s “Nazarite” asceticism especially, into his own. The birth narratives the Gospel of Barnabas has Mary vow her son (not Elizabeth her son) to the Nazarite Oath:

you shall keep him from wine and from strong drink and from every unclean meat, because the child is a holy one of God.<sup>27</sup>

Jesus is the Nazarite in the Barnabas story. This too can be explained as a Maccabean motif. It was at Mizpah in 1 Maccabees, in the very passages Barnabas draws upon, that Judas Maccabee “marshalled the Nazarites” as part of his war preparations.<sup>28</sup> Barnabas’ Jesus is sworn from wine and strong drink and he shuns every unclean meat, and he sojourns in the wilderness with his followers living on wild foods. There is a clear connection, moreover, between shunning unclean meats and living on wild foods. The Temple is polluted. In a fiery interchange with the “Priests and doctors” in the Temple in chapter 66 Jesus puts the matter forthrightly:

...not without cause did God say by Isaiah the prophet: *O My people, those that bless you deceive you.* Woe to you, scribes

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<sup>25</sup> See Ch. 126.

<sup>26</sup> See 2 Macc. 8:6.

<sup>27</sup> Ch. 1.

<sup>28</sup> 1 Macc. 3:49.

and Pharisees! Woe to you, priests and Levites! because you have corrupted the sacrifice of the Lord, so that those who come to sacrifice believe that God eats cooked flesh [in the manner of] a man.<sup>29</sup>

The question of God “eating” here signals Barnabas’ use of the themes of Psalm 50 to condemn as corrupted the Temple sacrifices. In chapter 67 he argues, with allusions to Psalm 50, that the Priests defraud the people and keep them in ignorance. “You say to the people,” Jesus says:

‘Bring your sheep and bulls and lambs to the Temple of your God, and do not eat it all, but give to your God a share of that which he has given you’; and you do not tell them of the origin of sacrifice...

And he misquotes Ezekiel as saying: *Remove from me these your sacrifices, your victims are abominable to me.* Next he warns the Priests of the ultimate consequence of their corruption:

The time draws near when that shall be done of which our God spoke by Hosea the prophet, saying: *I will call chosen the people not chosen.* And as he says in Ezekiel the prophet: *God shall make a new covenant with his people, not according to the covenant which he gave to your fathers, which they did not and he shall take from them a heart of stone, and give them a new heart:* and all this shall be because you do not walk now in His Law

Their failure to “walk in His Law” is here synonymous with their corruption of His sacrifices and it leads to the forfeiture of Divine favour. The danger is that the covenant will slip away from God’s people. In the Christian scriptures, of course, Jesus is the *agent* of this New Covenant, the agent of supersession. In Barnabas the New Covenant is a *danger* that Jesus warns the Priests and doctors against, a final outcome—“the time draws near”—of their corruption of the sacrifices. This is a projection to future events, but Jesus is explicitly Judas Maccabee again in chapter 45:

Woe to you, priests and doctors... for God will take away from you the priesthood!

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<sup>29</sup> Ch. 66.

Jesus' specific accusation in this scene is that the "priests and doctors" have turned the "Temple of God" into a "cave of robbers." The "cave of robbers" of course has been displaced in the text from the Expulsion of the Merchants/Soldiers scene,<sup>30</sup> but it has the same connections. We are referred back to the "Syrian robbers" again.<sup>31</sup> Following this in Barnabas comes the Parable of Wicked Husbandmen which, in the context, emerges as a transparent parable justifying the Maccabean overthrow of a corrupt priesthood that had allowed the "robbers" into the Temple.<sup>32</sup> The threat here, it will be noticed, is not that Divine favour will slip away, or that the Temple will be destroyed, but only that God will take the *Priesthood* from those who have filled the Temple of God with "robbers", *Syrian* robbers. This can only be an allusion to the Maccabean revolt. The sacrifices are corrupt; the Temple is full of robbers. The husbandmen have abused the vineyard. They must be replaced.<sup>33</sup>

When he is not directly confronting the "Priests and doctors" in the Temple and condemning their sacrifices and their pollution of the Holy Place, the answer the Barnabas Jesus offers to the problem of corrupt sacrifices is living in the wilderness. What does one do when the sacrifices in the Temple are corrupt and the priests are in league with "robbers"? The answer is that one must return to some pre-Temple mode of worship. Barnabas follows a familiar Judaic theme, connecting the eating of "herbs and wild fruit" with the Feast of Tabernacles and its return-to-the-wilderness motif. Moses and the Israelites worshipped in the wilderness without a Temple, as the Feast of Tabernacles is there to remind us. But again, Tabernacles is a distinctly Maccabean theme. The Maccabean festival - Hannukah - commemorates the rededication of the Temple after the Revolt and is popularly (euphemistically)

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<sup>30</sup> The displacement of the "cave of robbers" phrase seems to be caused by the author—who is, in part, composing a harmony of the four gospels—trying to reconcile the early placement of the 'Expulsion' episode in John's Gospel with its late placement in the Synoptics. But in doing so he connects the account of Jesus warning the Priests that they will lose the Priesthood with the Expulsion of the Soldiers from the Temple. The whole configuration refers to the Maccabean revolt.

<sup>31</sup> Ch. 188.

<sup>32</sup> Others have read it as a parable about Christian supersession of Judaism—which it is—but here, in the context, it refers to the Maccabean challenge to the ancient Jerusalem priesthood.

<sup>33</sup> The Maccabean control of the High Priesthood happened under Judas Maccabee's brothers Jonathon and Simon, but I do not think such a distinction is important to our author (or his source). Again, Josephus' account of Judas Maccabee may be involved: Josephus presents Judas Maccabee as "High Priest".

known as the Feast of Lights, but in 2 Maccabees it is presented as a Feast of Tabernacles.<sup>34</sup> It was also at Tabernacles that a Maccabee put on the sacred vestments of the High Priesthood fulfilling the objectives of the Revolt.<sup>35</sup> The longest section of Jesus' instruction of his disciples in the wilderness is constructed around the eight days of Tabernacles. Jesus instructs his followers from "under the shade of a palm tree"<sup>36</sup>—a certain allusion to Tabernacles—and at the end of their wilderness ordeal he says to them:

You needs must seek of the fruits of the field the wherewithal to sustain our life, for it is now eight days that we have eaten no bread.<sup>37</sup>

This connection with Tabernacles is repeated in the Barnabas version of the Tabernacles-based Transfiguration episode after which:

Jesus went down to the eight disciples who were awaiting him below. And the four narrated to the eight all that they had seen: and so there departed that day from their heart all doubt of Jesus, save [from] Judas Iscariot, who believed nothing. Jesus seated himself at the foot of the mountain, and they ate of the wild fruits, because they had not bread.<sup>38</sup>

The governing idea in these cases is that Jesus and his followers—rejecting the Temple sacrifices as corrupt—return to the Tabernacles tradition of living on the God-given resources of nature.<sup>39</sup> The palm tree is their shelter and "herbs and wild fruit" and the "fruits of the field" their sustenance. (In an odd touch in chapter 113 the disciples return from one of their "missions" with food in the form of "pine cones" [pine nuts?] and "by the will of God... a good quantity of dates"). Barnabas' Jesus clearly par-

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<sup>34</sup> 2 Macc. 1:9, 1:18.

<sup>35</sup> Again, the distinction between Judas and Jonathon Maccabee is probably not important to our medieval author. Jonathon completed what Judas began.

<sup>36</sup> Ch. 106.

<sup>37</sup> Ch. 112.

<sup>38</sup> Ch. 43.

<sup>39</sup> The importance of the Feast of Tabernacles in Barnabas needs a full study. There are many references and allusions, including a reference to its Greek name 'Senofegia' in chpt. 30. The whole of Barnabas' Sermon on the Mount seems to have a Tabernacles background, and he places the 'Water into Wine' wedding miracle in Jerusalem "near unto Tabernacles"—Ch. 15—in an allusion to the water and wine (and marriage) symbolism of the festival.

ticipates in a “wilderness lifestyle” much like that of Judas Maccabee of 2 Maccabees, and for much the same reasons. Eisenman notes the importance of Tabernacles for its “wilderness sojourning” but also for its status as a festival commemorating the Law.<sup>40</sup> The relevance of the Feast of Tabernacles is plain. Barnabas’ Jesus is zealous for the Law, seeks to walk in the Law, expels the foreign soldiers from the Temple and the land, rejects the Temple sacrifices as corrupt, regards the Priesthood as needing to be replaced, and retires with his disciples to the wilderness to live on wild food in preparation for fresh “missions” into Judea. It is surprising how well the work conforms—by theme and terminology—to Eisenman’s analysis of a militant wilderness tradition stemming from the Maccabean Revolt. That Barnabas’ depictions of this tradition overlap with a very James-like Ebionite Jesus makes the consonances almost uncanny.

Eisenman’s identification of these “wilderness sojourners” as “Rechabites” also reappears in a surprising way. We have already seen the strongly ascetic character of the Barnabas Jesus, and how Jesus, and not John, is the Nazarite in the Barnabas gospel. This has been supplemented throughout the work with a large body of monkish material that can be identified as *Carmelite* in origin. The reference to Elijah as one who responded to persecution by adopting the “wild herb” lifestyle is amplified in the later sections of the work especially; a distinct Carmelite point of view permeates the whole work. It is Elijah who is set up as the model of wilderness asceticism and it is revealed that our medieval author is a great admirer of the self-proclaimed followers of Elijah, the primitive monks of Mount Carmel. This is important for understanding the provenance and background of the work. It is written under Carmelite inspiration. This might point to a body of (unorthodox) material originating in Palestine or Syria, as Bowman suggested,<sup>41</sup> and carried into Europe when the Carmelites relocated at the close of the Crusades. It is little appreciated that the Carmelites—at least according to some of their sources—claim to be a continuation of the ancient *Rechabites*. They claim, in fact, to have pre-Christian origins; the only Christian Order to claim an Old Testament founder. Eisenman is alive to the ways in which the themes he encounters in the

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<sup>40</sup> R. Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), p. 311.

<sup>41</sup> J. Bowman, “The Gospel of Barnabas and the Samaritans”, *Abr-Nahrain* Vol. 30, Leiden, 1992, pp. 20-33.

ancient texts persisted into the Middle Ages, particularly in strands of Spanish Qabbalah, but he seems unaware, or neglects to note, that the Carmelite monks — in their primitive form in Palestine — maintained the Rechabite life, or something akin to it. When the primitive order was relocated to Europe it underwent radical transformation and was stripped of much of its Rechabite character; in particular, the monks, as the result of a Dominican inquiry into their history and origins, were forced to drink wine and eat (some) meat as a condition of a legitimate place in the Latin Christian fold. The Gospel of Barnabas glorifies the primitive Carmelites and their strict adherence to Elijah's wilderness regime. This is the medieval context of the material we have been considering—it is in some manner related to the claims of the medieval Carmelites to be heirs to important strands of the ancient Rechabite/wilderness traditions. Eisenman sees reflections of theme and terminology in the medieval Qabbalah: we might see in the Gospel of Barnabas reflections from before the Carmelites were absorbed into Latin orthodoxy and that might preserve ancient Near Eastern understandings of these traditions. In particular, as we have seen, the work preserves an understanding of Judas Maccabee and the Maccabean revolt as the model for the wilderness tradition, including its manifestations in the gospels and their portrait of Jesus. The textual connections—“Mispeh,” the “Syrian robbers”— are clear, demonstrable, and explicit. And, importantly, they implicate canonical episodes perhaps shining light on their origins. Could our medieval author have made these reconstructions without insights into ancient traditions? Once again the medieval Barnabas emerges as a far more interesting work than it appears to be on a casual acquaintance.