

THE DIDACHE

(The Teaching)

with comments by
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The Greek word didache means "teaching." The Didache is the short title of an ancient document that contains some very early Christian doctrines. Although a document of that name is referred to by several ancient writers, it apparently was lost. It was re-discovered in Constantinople in 1875, in a manuscript dated 1056 that also included several other documents either known or referred to as having been written before AD 150.

The Didache seems to consist of five parts, here shown as chapters although these divisions are not in the document. The first part shows what a genuine teacher of Christian righteousness will say and how he or she will go about teaching. The second part deals with the question of clean and unclean foods, and outlines procedures for baptism, fasting, prayer, the Eucharist and the love-feast. The third sets policies on the treatment of apostles and prophets by members of the congregation. The fourth organizes the church, and the fifth briefly summarizes teachings concerning the second coming of Christ at end of the age.

This translation of the Didache is not copyrighted.

Chapter I -- On Righteousness

1:1 There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and the difference between the two ways is great.

"The two ways" is an ancient teaching. In his farewell address to the children of Israel, Moses said, "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore chose life, that you and your descendants may live." (Deuteronomy 30:19) The same two ways are found in Jeremiah 21:8 and Matthew 7:13-14.

The Epistle of Barnabas states it this way: "There are two ways of teaching and of power, one of light and one of darkness, and there is a great difference between these two ways. For on the one are stationed the light-giving angels of God; on the other the angels of Satan. And the one is Lord from all eternity and to all eternity, whereas the other is Lord of the season of iniquity that now is." (Barnabas 18:1-2)

1:2 The way of life is this: first, you shall love the God who made you; second, your neighbor as yourself, and whatever you would not have done to you, do not do to another.

These are the two great commandments (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18) according to Jesus (Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:29-31, Luke 10:25-28), plus the negative form of the Golden Rule, "Do not do to another what you would not want done to you."

The negative form of the Golden Rule is not in the New Testament, although the thought is in Romans 13:10. It is found in the literature of many religions and philosophies: Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Jewish, Greek, Roman, Islamic. It provides a basis for self-restraint; and in practice, it can change a person from harmful to harmless (from negative to neutral in terms of effect on others).

Jesus taught the positive form of the Golden Rule: "Do for another what you would want done for you" (Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31). It provides a basis for personal initiative; and in practice, it can change a person from harmful to helpful (from neutral to positive in terms of effect on others). Thus, by the result it produces, the positive form of the Golden Rule is a higher ethic, properly seen as building upon and going beyond the negative form of the Golden Rule.

1:3 And the teaching of these maxims is this: bless those who curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast on behalf of those who persecute you; for what thanks is there, if you love them that love you? Do not even Gentiles do the same? But love those who hate you, and you will not have an enemy.

Matthew 5:43-47, Luke 6:27-35, Romans 12:14

1:4 Abstain from fleshly and bodily lusts. If anyone gives you a blow on your right cheek, turn to him the other also, and you will be perfect [full-grown, fully-mature]. If anyone compels you to go a mile, go with him two; if anyone takes your cloak, give him your coat also; if anyone takes from you what is yours, do not ask for it back nor try to use force.

"Abstain from fleshly and bodily lusts" is a very terse summary of numerous teachings throughout the New Testament. (e.g., Matthew 5:27-30, Ephesians 4:22, I Thessalonians 4:3-5, I John 2:16-17). "Turn the other cheek, go the second mile, and give your coat also" are in Matthew 5:39-41 and Luke 6:29.

1:5 Give to everyone who asks of you, and do not demand it back; for the Father wants something from his own free gifts to be given to all. Blessed is he who gives according to the commandment, for he is guiltless; but woe to him who receives; for if one who receives is actually in need, he is guiltless; but whoever receives when not in need will have to explain why he received and for what purpose; in prison he will be interrogated concerning the things he has done, and he will not depart from there until he has paid the last penny.

"Give to everyone who asks of you" is in Matthew 5:42 and Luke 6:30. Paul quoted Jesus as saying, "It is more blessed to give than receive." (Acts 20:35) "Until you have paid the last penny" is in Matthew 5:26 but not in this context.

1:6 Yes, truly it has been said about this: "Let your alms sweat in your hands until you know to whom to give."

As far as I can tell, this saying is not anywhere in the Bible.

2:1 And the teaching of the second commandment is this: 2 You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery; you shall not seduce boys; you shall not fornicate. You shall not steal. You shall not be a fortuneteller; you shall not practice sorcery. You shall not kill a child by abortion nor slay it when born. You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor. 3 You shall not commit perjury; you shall not give false testimony; you shall not speak evil; you shall not bear malice; 4 you shall not be double-minded or double-tongued, for a double-tongue is a snare of death. 5 Your word shall not be false or empty, but confirmed by deeds. 6 You shall not be greedy or rapacious or hypocritical or malicious or arrogant. You shall not take up an evil plot against your neighbor. 7 You shall not hate anyone, but some you shall rebuke, and some you shall pray for, and some you shall love more than your own soul.

This teacher starts most statements of moral instruction with "You shall not..." Almost every thought in this paragraph is in Barnabas 19, sometimes verbatim, although not in this sequence.

3:1 My child, flee from everything that is evil and everything that is like it. 2 Do not be wrathful, for wrath leads to murder, nor jealous nor contentious nor quarrelsome, for from all these murder ensues. 3 My child, do not be lustful, for lust leads to fornication, nor a filthy-talker nor a lewd-looker, for from all these adulteries ensue. 4 My child, do not be an interpreter of omens, since it leads to idolatry, nor an enchanter nor an astrologer nor a magical purifier, nor wish to see them, for from all these idolatry arises. 5 My child, do not be a liar, for lying leads to theft, nor avaricious nor conceited, for from all these thefts are produced. 6 My child, do not be a complainer, since it leads to blasphemy, nor self-willed nor evil-minded, for from all these blasphemies are produced. 7 Be meek, for the meek will inherit the earth. 8 Be long-suffering and merciful and guileless and peaceable and good, and revere always the words you have heard.

This is a different teacher. He habitually addresses people as "My child" and he includes cause-and-effect explanations with his moral instructions. "The meek shall inherit the earth" is in Psalm 37:11 and Matthew 5:5.

3: 9 You shall not exalt yourself, nor let your soul be presumptuous. Your soul shall not be joined with the lofty, but with the righteous and humble you shall walk. 10 You shall accept what befalls you as good, knowing that without God nothing happens.

Oops, the first teacher interrupts the second. These thoughts are found almost verbatim in Barnabas (19:3, 19:6).

4:1 My child, remember night and day him who speaks the word of God to you; honor him as the Lord, for where his lordship is proclaimed, there is the Lord. 2 Seek out daily the faces of the saints, that you may rest in their words.

The second teacher again. This document captures specific styles of teaching so thoroughly it invokes the "voice" of the teacher. Who taught like this? See the first epistle attributed to John. Although the authorship of that letter is in doubt, whoever it was certainly sounds like this.

4:3 You shall not desire schism, but shall set at peace those who contend. You shall judge righteously; you shall not show partiality when rebuking for transgressions. 4 You shall not vacillate about whether a thing will be or will not be. 5 You shall not be one who stretches out his hands to receive but one who draws them back when someone is giving.

The first teacher. All these thoughts are in Barnabas (19:12, 19:11, 19:4, 19:7, 19:9).

4:6 If you have anything in your hands, give a ransom for your sins. 7 You shall not hesitate to give; neither shall you grumble when giving, for you know who is the fair paymaster of your reward. 8 You shall not turn away from him who is actually in need, but share with your brother in all things and not say things are your own, for if you are partners in what is imperishable, how much more so in perishable things?

Barnabas 19:11, 19:8

4:9 You shall not remove your hand from your son or your daughter, but from their youth teach them the fear of God.

Barnabas 19:6

4:10 You shall not command in your bitterness your slave or your maid who hope in the same God as yourself, lest they cease to fear the God who is over you both; for he comes not with regard for reputation, but to those whom the Spirit has prepared. 11 And you slaves, subordinate yourselves to your masters in shame and fear, as to an image of God.

Barnabas 19:7 -- with the two sentences in the opposite order.

4:12 You shall hate all hypocrisy, and everything that is not pleasing to the Lord. 13 You shall not abandon the commandments of the Lord, but guard what you have received, neither adding nor subtracting anything. 14 You shall confess your transgressions in the congregation; and you shall not come to prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life.

Barnabas 19:2b, 19:11b, 19:12b

5:1 But this is the way of death: first of all, it is evil and full of curses, murders, adulteries, lusts, fornications, thefts, idolatries, fortune-tellings, sorceries, robberies; false testimony, hypocrisy, duplicity, deception, arrogance, malice, stubbornness, greed, filthy-talking, jealousy, audacity, pride, boastfulness;

Barnabas 20:1 reads, "But the way of the black one is crooked and completely cursed. For it is a way of eternal death and punishment, in which lie things that destroy men's souls: idolatry, audacity, exaltation of power, hypocrisy..." followed by a list of sins very similar to those in the Didache, but not in the same sequence.

5:2 persecuting good men, hating truth, loving falsehood, not knowing the reward of righteousness, not adhering to what is good nor to righteous judgment; watching not for that which is good but for that which is evil; far from gentleness and patience, loving worthless things, pursuing recompense, having no mercy for the needy, not working for him that is distressed, not recognizing him who made them; murderers of children, corrupters of the image of God, turning away from him that is in need, oppressing him that is distressed, advocates of the rich, unjust judges of the poor, utterly sinful. May you be delivered, my children, from all these!

Barnabas 20:2 has this paragraph almost verbatim and in the same sequence, but it does not have the last sentence. The last sentence sounds like a spontaneous endorsement by the second teacher.

6:1 Take heed lest anyone lead you astray from this way of teaching, for he who does so teaches you away from God.

This sentence sums up the theme of Chapter I.

6:2 If you can carry the whole yoke of the Lord, you will be perfect [full-grown, fully-mature]; but if you cannot, then do what you can.

"Be ye therefore perfect" is in Leviticus 19:2 and Matthew 5:48. The rest of this sentence is a point of departure: there is no such allowance for compromise in the teachings of Jesus. Indeed, his teachings are notably uncompromising.

6:3 Concerning food, bear what you can, but carefully keep away from food sacrificed to idols, for it is a worship-service to gods from the realm of the dead.

The prohibition against eating food sacrificed to idols was one part of the decision of the Council of Jerusalem in AD 49. The entire decision was sent as a letter to all the churches (Acts 15:20-29, 21:25), so why doesn't the Didache include all of it?

Chapter II -- On Piety

7:1 Concerning baptism, baptize thus: having first recited all these precepts, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in running water. 2 But if you have no running water, baptize in other water, and if you cannot baptize in cold water, then warm water; 3 but if you have neither, pour water on the head three times in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. 4 Before a baptism, let him who baptizes and him who is baptized fast, and any others who may be able to do so. And command him who is baptized to fast one or two days beforehand.

The Trinity formula "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" appears only once in the New Testament (Matthew 28:19). It is probably a later insert (redaction) in both the Didache and Matthew's Gospel, because the Trinity was not defined until AD 362. The original reading was probably "In the name of the Lord" (see the Didache 9:5). Fasting before baptism dropped out of our tradition somewhere along the line.

8:1 Do not let your fasting be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second day and the fifth day of the week [Monday and Thursday], but you shall fast on the fourth day and the day of preparation [Wednesday and Friday].

The word "hypocrite" occurs 21 times in the New Testament. Mark uses it once. Luke uses it four times. In addition to parallels, Matthew uses it eleven times in passages that are found only in his gospel. All these are sayings of Jesus in which "hypocrite" refers to the most religious Jews of his day. Interestingly enough, this word is not found in Acts or any of the epistles.

8:2 Neither pray as the hypocrites, but as the Lord commanded in his gospel: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debt, as we also forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for yours is the power and the glory, forever." 3 Pray this way three times a day.

Which Gospel is referred to here? The Lord's Prayer is not in Mark or John. It is worded this way in Matthew (6:9-13) but not in Luke (11:2-4).

9:1 And concerning the thanks-giving [Eucharist], give thanks thus: 2 first, concerning the cup: "We thank you, our Father, for the holy vine of your son David, which you have made known to us through your son Jesus; to you be the glory forever."

Direct comparison of "your son David" and "your son Jesus" must be a very early doctrine, predating the doctrine that Jesus is the only son of God and the doctrine set forth by Athanasius in AD 318 that Jesus was God Incarnate. This is probably one reason why Athanasius excluded the Didache when he finalized the list of New Testament books in AD 367. Paul compared David and Jesus (Acts 13:16-41, Romans 5:15-17, I Timothy 2:5).

9:3 And concerning the broken bread: "We thank you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you have made known to us through your son Jesus; to you be the glory forever. 4 As this broken bread was once scattered on the mountains, and gathered together became one, so may your congregation be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom; for yours is the glory and the power, through Jesus Christ, forever." 5 But let no one eat or drink of your thanks-giving except those who have been baptized in the name of the Lord, for the Lord has said, "Do not give that which is holy to the dogs."

There is nothing like this in the New Testament. Paul's instructions concerning the Lord's Supper do not include a model prayer (I Corinthians 11:20-34). "Give not that which is holy to the dogs" is in Matthew (7:6), but not in this context.

10:1 And after you are filled, give thanks thus: 2 "We thank you, holy Father, for your holy name, which you have caused to dwell in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality which you have made known to us through your son Jesus; to you be the glory forever. 3 You, Almighty Master, created all things for the sake of your name, and give men food and drink to enjoy, that they might give thanks to you, but to us you give spiritual food and drink and eternal life through your son. 4 Above all, we give thanks that you are powerful; to you be the glory forever. 5 Remember your congregation, Lord, to redeem it from all evil and perfect it in your love; and gather it together, the one that has been sanctified, from the four winds into your kingdom which you have prepared for it; for yours is the kingdom and the glory forever. 6 May grace come, and may this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David! If anyone is holy let him come; if anyone is not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen." 7 But let the prophets give thanks however they wish.

The phrase "the one (church) that has been sanctified" is probably a very clumsy redaction inserted some time after the Roman Emperor Theodosius declared the Nicene sect of Christianity the only sanctified Church in AD 380.

Paul prayed, "Yours be the glory forever." (Romans 11:36, 16:27, Galatians 1:5, Ephesians 3:20-21).

Paul used the Syrian expression maran-atha which means "Our Lord continues to come." It appears only once in the Bible (I Corinthians 16:22). Paul's home (Tarsus) was in the Syrian-speaking part of Cilicia. Thus, maran-atha may very well have been Paul's signature -- his personal testimony that Jesus continued to come to him after his conversion on the road to Damascus.

Chapter III -- On Apostles and Prophets

11:1 Therefore, whoever comes and teaches you all these things aforesaid, receive him. 2 If the teacher himself is perverted and teaches a different doctrine to the subversion thereof, do not listen to him; but if he increases your righteousness and knowledge of the Lord, receive him as you would the Lord. 3 And concerning the apostles and prophets, do according to the command of the Gospel. 4 Let every apostle who comes to you be received as you would the Lord. 5 He will stay one day, and if necessary, a second day, but if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. 6 Let the apostle when departing take nothing except bread until he arrives at his next lodging. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet.

This clearly indicates that at least some of the apostles were still living when the Didache was written. It reflects what Jesus said when he told his apostles not to provide for themselves on their journeys (Matthew 10:10-11), and it suggests that supporting apostles could be a burden on the people with whom they stayed.

Matthew uses the word "apostle" once (10:2), Mark uses it once (6:30), and Luke uses it six times in his gospel, but none of these passages contain any command. Paul used the phrase "apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 3:4-6).

"Let every apostle that comes to you be received as the Lord" is akin to something Jesus said: "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward." (Matthew 10:40-41)

11:7 Do not tempt or dispute with any prophet who speaks in spirit, for every sin will be forgiven, but this sin will not be forgiven. 8 However, not every one who speaks in spirit is a prophet, but only he who has

the disposition of the Lord; therefore, by their dispositions the false prophet and the prophet shall be known.

The unforgivable sin is to see the work of God and say, "That is the work of the Devil" (Matthew 12:31-32, Mark 3:29, Luke 12:10). "By their fruits you shall know them" refers to discernment of true and false prophets in Matthew (7:15-20), but the parallel in Luke (6:43-45) refers to a good man rather than a prophet.

11:9 Any prophet who orders a meal in spirit shall not eat of it; if he does, he is a false prophet. 10 If any prophet who teaches the truth does not do what he teaches, he is a false prophet. 11 And any prophet, true and approved, who performs rites to a secret cosmic assembly, but does not teach others to perform what he performs, shall not be judged by you, for his judgment is with God; for likewise also did the prophets of old. 12 If anyone says in spirit, "Give me silver," or whatever else, do not listen to him; but if he tells you about others in need, that you should give to them, let no one condemn him.

There must have been a problem with false prophets who tried to get things for themselves. Several commentaries note that Didache 11:11 is difficult to interpret. The phrase "performs rites to a secret cosmic assembly" is my literal translation. It probably meant that the congregation should not be alarmed if they saw and heard a prophet conversing with invisible members of the Kingdom of God. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: "Let two or three prophets speak and the others weigh what is said" (I Corinthians 14:29-32).

12:1 Let every one who comes in the name of the Lord be received, and then examine him judiciously -- right and left -- for the opinions he holds. 2 If the one who comes is a traveler, assist him as much as you can, but he shall not stay with you more than two or three days, unless there is a necessity. 3 If he wishes to settle with you and is a craftsman, let him work for his living. 4 If he is not a craftsman, decide according to your own judgment how he shall live as a Christian among you, but not in idleness. 5 If he will not do this, he is one who makes gain from Christ. From such keep aloof.

Paul taught against living in idleness, in AD 50 or 51 (II Thessalonians 3:6-12).

The word "Christian" appears only three times in the Bible. The disciples were first called Christians at Antioch of Syria about AD 43 (Acts 11:26); King Herod Agrippa II said to Paul, "In a short time you think to make me a Christian!" about AD 59 (Acts 26:28); and Simon Peter wrote, "If one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed..." no later than AD 64 or 65 (I Peter 4:16).

Chapter IV -- On Organization

13:1 Every true prophet who desires to settle among you is worthy of his food. 2 Likewise, a true teacher also is worthy, but like the craftsman, he works for his living. 3 Therefore, take the first-fruits of every product of the wine-press and threshing-floor, of oxen and sheep, and give it to the prophets, for they are your chief priests. 4 And if you have no prophet, give it to the poor. 5 If you make bread, take the first-fruits and give according to the commandment. 6 In like manner, when you open a jar of wine or oil, take the first-fruits and give it to the prophets. 7 Yes, and of money and clothing and every possession, take the first-fruits, as seems good to you, and give according to the commandment.

There were "prophets and teachers" in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). Paul wrote, "God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues." (I Corinthians 12:28-31)

Paul and Barnabas earned their own living, but Peter did not -- and Paul did not preach what he practiced in that regard. On the contrary, he strongly maintained that the workman is worthy of his wage (I Corinthians 9:1-27). However, I find nothing in the New Testament about giving the first-fruits to the local prophets.

14:1 Gather together on the Lord's day, break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure. 2 But do not let anyone who has a quarrel with a companion join with you until they have been reconciled, so that your sacrifice may not be polluted; 3 for this was spoken by the Lord: "In every place and time offer me a pure sacrifice, for I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the Gentiles."

The Lord's Day was established as the first day of the week (Sunday) very early in the history of the church. "Reconcile before coming to the altar" is in Matthew 5:23-24. The quote on pure sacrifice is slightly paraphrased from Malachi 1:11.

15:1 Therefore, elect for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are meek and not lovers of money, true and approved, for they also perform for you the ministry of the prophets and teachers.
2 Therefore, do not despise them, for they are your honorable men, along with the prophets and teachers.

Paul used "bishop" as equivalent to "elder" (Philippians 1:1, I Timothy 3:1-18, Titus 1:5-14). In Greek, bishop means "overseer" and deacon means "servant".

"Elect for yourselves" is in stark contrast to the doctrine that bishops must only be consecrated by bishops, and the doctrine of "apostolic succession". The fact that it includes this democratic doctrine, later replaced by the hierarchy, was probably another reason why Athanasius excluded the Didache when he finalized the list of 27 New Testament books in AD 367.

15:3 And reprove one another, not in anger but peaceably, as you have it in the Gospel, and let no one speak to any one who wrongs his brother, neither listen to him, until he repents. 4 And your prayers and almsgiving and all your deeds, do as you find it in the Gospel of our Lord.

This is Jesus's procedure for reproving a brother (Matthew 18:15-17). When you give alms and when you pray: (Matthew 6:2-8). When you fast: (Matthew 6:16-17).

Chapter V -- On the Future

16:1 Be watchful for your life; do not let your lamps be quenched or your loins be ungirded, but be ready, for you do not know the hour in which our Lord comes. 2 Be often gathered together, seeking what is fit for your souls, for the whole time of your faith will not profit you if you are not perfect [full-grown, fully-mature] at the end of the season. 3 For in the last days false prophets and seducers will be multiplied, and the sheep will be turned into wolves, and love will be turned into hate. 4 For as lawlessness increases, they will hate and persecute and betray one another. And then the deceiver of the world will appear as a son of God, and he will do signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will do unlawful things such as never happened since the world began. 5 Then the creation of man will come to the fiery trial of testing, and many will stumble and perish, but those who endure in the faith will be saved alive from under the curse. 6 And then will appear the signs of the truth: first the sign of an opening in the heavens, then the sign of the sound of the trumpet, and thirdly a resurrection of the dead: 7 not of all, but as it is said: "The Lord will come and all his saints with him." 8 Then the world will see the Lord coming on the clouds of heaven.

This abbreviated version of the apocalypse is the simplest and clearest I have ever seen, but it does not copy any other version of the apocalypse I can find. Also worth noting: nothing in the Didache indicates any awareness of the Jewish rebellion in AD 66 or the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Content Analysis

The Didache contains some material that is also in Matthew and Luke, rather a lot that is only in Matthew, and much that is not in any of the canonized gospels, but -- and this is remarkable -- *it contains virtually nothing that is found in Mark.*

How could that have happened? If the Didache was based on Matthew, as most New Testament scholars assume, how did the writer manage to exclude virtually everything that Matthew copied from Mark? And even if he had both of those gospels open in front of him, why would he want to do that?

A more likely hypothesis is:

Sayings of Jesus were probably in wide circulation in both oral and written form. The Didache refers to a collection of the sayings of Jesus known as "The Gospel of the Lord" but none of the four canonized gospels. Mark wrote his Gospel based on the preaching of Peter, as most New Testament scholars

maintain. Matthew had the Didache and copied from it as he did from Mark: that would explain the origin of the passages that are only in the Didache and Matthew. Luke compiled his Gospel from several sources, including Mark, but he did not have the Didache.

Much of the material in the Didache is also in Acts and/or the Epistles of Paul. The style of these parts is typical of Paul.

The common source for parts of the Didache and the Epistle of Barnabas is not very difficult to ascertain. If we were to compare two sermons by Billy Graham, one given in the 1950s and the other in the 1990s, many phrases and even whole sentences would be virtually identical, but not in the same sequence -- which is precisely what we find in the Didache and the Epistle of Barnabas. Therefore, the most probable source is Barnabas himself, early and late in his career.

The Didache shows several abrupt changes in vocabulary, phrasing, and ways of addressing an audience that capture the "voices" of three different speakers. In sum, it reads like a set of lecture notes taken by someone listening to three people.

Historical Context

Many strong parallels point to Paul and Barnabas as the apostles involved in this teaching. If so, what we know about them from other sources brackets the time and place in which the Didache was written.

The followers of Jesus first preached the gospel only to Jews. After several years, some of them started preaching to Gentiles in Antioch of Syria, many of whom were converted. When the leaders of the church in Jerusalem heard about this, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. He found a sizable congregation and many more people eager to hear about Jesus. So Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Paul to Antioch. They taught there together for a year. (Acts 11:19-26)

Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world, and this took place in the days of Claudius. And the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea; and they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Paul.
(Acts 11:27-30)

Historical sources say there was a great famine in Judea in AD 47. Therefore, Acts 12:1-23 may be misplaced in Luke's otherwise chronological report. "About that time" King Herod killed James the brother of John and arrested Peter; but Peter escaped from prison, and King Herod died at Caesarea. There are historical records that King Herod (Agrippa I) died during a festival at Caesarea in AD 44. Luke adds a time-space: "But the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24).

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul wrote:

Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up by revelation; and I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain. (Galatians 2:1-2)

Fourteen years after Paul's first visit to Jerusalem probably equates to AD 47. The Didache may be what Paul laid before the leaders in Jerusalem -- a summary document prepared in advance for just that purpose -- or more likely from the way it sounds, a set of lecture notes taken while Barnabas and Paul and Titus were speaking. In either case it is worth noting that in the Didache and in Acts 15:12 Barnabas speaks first. He was the leader at Antioch. Paul was his assistant.

when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Peter and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Galatians 2:9)

This was when Barnabas and Paul received their charter as "The Apostles to the Gentiles." They returned from Jerusalem to Antioch, bringing Mark with them. (Acts 12:25) Shortly thereafter, all three of them set out on Paul's first missionary journey, which scholars date in AD 47. (Acts 13:1-4)

They went from Antioch to and through the island of Cyprus, and then north to what is now the southern coast of Turkey. There Mark left them and went back to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas went on establishing new churches in the Roman province of Galatia. They returned to the coast by the way they came, sailed back to Antioch of Syria, and "remained no little time with the disciples." (Acts 13 - 14)

But some men came down from Jerusalem [to Antioch] and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." (Acts 15:1)

Paul's letter to the Galatians was probably written at this time. No doubt, men from Jerusalem also told his converts in Galatia that they had to be circumcised. Paul was angry because the leaders in Jerusalem had broken their agreement by sending men to the Gentiles. Thus, his letter to the Galatians was written in late AD 48 or early AD 49.

Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go [from Antioch] up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. (Acts 15:2b)

Scholars date the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem in AD 49. The controversy was not between Paul and Peter. After all, Peter was the one who first preached the gospel to Gentiles (Acts 11:1-3). It was between Paul and "the circumcision party" led by James of Jerusalem, the brother of Jesus (Galatians 2:12).

Peter spoke first, in favor of preaching the gospel to Gentiles. Then Barnabas and Paul presented their case. Finally, James of Jerusalem yielded. The decision was that Gentiles did not have to become Jews in order to be Christians, but they must: "Abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity." (Acts 15:6-21, 29) The first part of this decision is in the Didache (6:3); the other three provisions apparently were added to it by the "apostles and elders" in Jerusalem.

With their charter thus reaffirmed, Paul and Barnabas were ready to carry the decision of the Apostolic Council back to the churches they established. Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them again, but Paul objected because Mark left them during their previous journey. Paul and Barnabas quarreled. Finally, Barnabas took Mark with him and went back to Cyprus (Acts 15:36-39). This is the last we hear of Barnabas in the New Testament, except for an indication that he was still preaching the gospel several years later (I Corinthians 9:6).

The long title of the Didache in the manuscript dated 1056 reads: "The Teaching of the Lord by the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles" but I believe the original title was "The Teaching of the Apostles to the Gentiles" and the rest was inserted later.

Certainly Barnabas and Paul were "The Apostles to the Gentiles." If the Didache is a sample of their teaching, as it certainly seems to be, then it must be dated no later than AD 49 because that was when they went their separate ways. The most probable date is either AD 44 or AD 47. In either case, those dates are earlier than anything in the New Testament. Therefore, I believe the Didache is the earliest Christian document we have. Although rightly regarded as a church handbook and not a Gospel or absolutely based on the teachings of Jesus, it provides valuable insights concerning the moral doctrines, theology, rituals, esoteric operations and congregational testing of apostles and prophets, and the basic organization of First Century Christianity.