Psalm 2 Verses 1 & 2 in Codex Alexandrinus (c. 420 AD)
Typographical facsimile prepared by Henry Hervey Baber and
Published by the British Museum in 1821

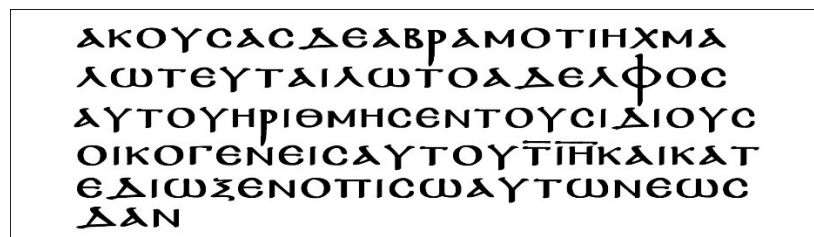# "Lord", "Jesus", "Christ" and "the Cross" in Old Testament Manuscripts

*How the Christians in the first centuries of the faith saw the Lord Jesus Christ and the Cross in manuscripts of the Old Testament*

*A brief introduction*

by

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Genesis 14:14 in handwriting typical of that seen
in manuscripts of the first five centuries of Christianity
(Alexandrinus LSU font courtesy of Linguist's Software Inc)

## Introduction

In this short article we will see how the Christian believers in the first and second century A.D., and in some subsequent early centuries, literally saw references to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Cross in many places, as they read the text of the Jewish Scriptures.

Luke 24 tells us that after his resurrection, when Christ accompanied the two people who were walking to Emmaus, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:27, NIV)[1]

The two men returned to Jerusalem and reported their experience to "the eleven and those with them" (Luke 24:33). The account continues, "While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them" (Luke 24:36, NIV). The passage continues: "He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." [45] Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. [46] He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, [47] and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:44-48, NIV)

Even before the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the first believers were looking into the Jewish Scriptures for guidance. See, for instance, Acts 1:15-20, which quotes from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8.

In the first sermon of the church, recorded in Acts chapter 2, the believers quoted from Old Testament Scriptures that they clearly understood to have been fulfilled in Christ's coming, ministry, death and resurrection. See Acts 2:16-21, a lengthy quotation from Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:25-28, a substantial quotation from Psalm 16:8-11 and Acts 2:34-35, from Psalm 110.1.

Inspired by Jesus' words recorded in Luke 24 and elsewhere, the early Christian believers searched the [Old Testament] Scriptures, looking for references to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Cross, convinced that they spoke of Christ. (See John 5:39.)

In the rest of the New Testament, it becomes clear that the first believers recognised many Old Testament prophecies about the coming of a Messiah, or Anointed One. For instance, Acts 8:32-33 quotes from Isaiah 53:7-8, and the context (Acts 8:26-39) shows how Philip explained that this was fulfilled in Jesus (verse 35).

In fact, the New Testament contains hundreds of quotations from the Jewish Scriptures, many of them understood as being about the Messiah and many of them used to demonstrate that Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee was indeed the prophesied Messiah.

Starting about 250 years before the coming of Jesus, Jews in Alexandria had translated their Scriptures, which had been written mostly in Hebrew, with some Aramaic, into Greek. This translation has become known as "the Septuagint" and references to it frequently use the Roman numeral for seventy, LXX, following the tradition that seventy translators translated these Scriptures.

By the time of Christ, for personal reading most Jews were reading their Scriptures from this Greek translation, not from the original languages, and New Testament quotations from the Old are usually taken from the Septuagint, not freshly translated by the speakers or writers from the Hebrew/Aramaic original.

For the Septuagint Greek text, we will use the standard edition, which was prepared by Alfred Rahlfs and revised by Robert Hanhart.[2]

The standard modern translation of the Septuagint is "The New English Translation of the Septuagint", which is generally referred to with the abbreviation "NETS".[3]

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[1] "Holy Bible, New International Version ® NIV ®" (Anglicised edition) Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica (formerly International Bible Society). Used by permission of Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, an Hachette UK company. All rights reserved. "NIV" is a registered trademark of Biblica (formerly International Bible Society). UK trademark number 1448790

[2] Rahlfs-Hanhart "Septuaginta", © Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006

[3] "A New English Translation of the Septuagint" ("NETS"), © 2007 by the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Inc. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Used by permission of Oxford University Press. All rights reserved.

## *"Lord", "Jesus", "Christ" and "the Cross" in Old Testament manuscripts*

First, we need to look briefly at two writing conventions used in the Septuagint, at least in copies of it used by Christians. For the first of these, *Nomina Sacra*, an earlier and more extended account will be found in the article by the present author on 1 Timothy 3:16.[4]

**Nomina Sacra**

In ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament and of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, certain words that were considered to have a special, sacred, significance were usually written in a special, abbreviated form. Writing in 1907, the German theologian Ludwig Traube gave to this phenomenon the Latin name *"nomina sacra"*, "sacred names" (singular: *"nomen sacrum"*).[5]

Modern explanations of this phenomenon can be found in Hurtado, "The Earliest Christian Artifacts"[6] and in Comfort, "Encountering the Manuscripts".[7]

Key words that were treated as *nomina sacra* included: God, Father, Lord, Jesus, Christ, Spirit and Son, with some other words being added over the course of a few centuries. For these words, usually only the first and the last letters of the word were written, or the first two letters. Normally, the word was marked with a horizontal bar above the word. When the word was read out loud, the full normal form was pronounced.

In this brief article we shall only look at the three words "Lord", "Jesus" and "Christ".

Greek is an inflected language in which the endings of many nouns change, depending on the grammatical context. There are up to five different forms for nouns, corresponding to the five grammatical cases (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative and vocative). We here refer to just the two forms that occur in the Bible passages that we subsequently look at.

| English | Modern Greek transcription | Nomina Sacra forms in early manuscripts used by Christians[8] |
|---|---|---|
| "Lord", nominative case | κύριος | K̅C̅ |
| "Lord", genitive case[9] | κυρίου | K̅Y̅ |
| "Jesus", nominative case | Ἰησοῦς | I̅C̅ |
| "Jesus", nominative case, alternative *Nomen Sacrum* form | Ἰησοῦς | I̅H̅ |
| "Anointed One" / "Christ", nominative case | χριστὸς | X̅C̅ |
| "Anointed One" / "Christ", genitive case | χριστοῦ | X̅Y̅ |

*Examples of Nomina Sacra*

The above words are not generally found written out in full in the oldest manuscripts of the Bible as used by Christians. However, here we show the full form, for comparison with the *nomina sacra* forms.

| ΚΥΡΙΟC | | ΧΡΙСΤΟC | | ΙΗСΟΥС |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| κύριος | | χριστὸς | | Ἰησοῦς |
| Lord (nominative) | | Anointed One/Christ (nominative) | | Jesus (nominative) |
| ΚΥΡΙΟΥ | | ΧΡΙСΤΟΥ | | |
| κυρίου | | χριστοῦ | | |
| (of the) Lord (genitive) | | (of the) Anointed One/Christ (genitive) | | |

*Examples of the above words written out in full*

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[4] http://livingwater-spain.com/1Tim3_16.pdf , page 8 in the edition consulted on 11.11.21.

[5] Traube, Ludwig, "Nomina Sacra: Versuch einer Geschichte der christlichen Kürzung", 1907; reprinted: Darmstadt: Wissen-schaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967

[6] Hurtado, Larry, "The Earliest Christian Artifacts", Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge (England): William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006, chapter 3 (pp. 95-134)

[7] Comfort, Philip W, "Encountering the Manuscripts", Nashville, TN, 2005: Broadman & Holman Publishers, chapter 4 (pp. 199-253)

[8] Sinaiticus LSU font courtesy of Linguist's Software Inc., https://www.linguistsoftware.com/

[9] The genitive case is often used when the English would be "of" + the corresponding noun ("of the Lord", "of Christ", etc.), although in some contexts the Greek requires the genitive case even if "of" would not be used in English.

We are here talking about handwriting conventions. This was not a space-saving or time-saving device. It was not some kind of "shorthand". Hurtado refers to the fact that in Roman-era inscriptions (whether in Latin or Greek), "abbreviations are frequent for the titles of governmental figures".[10] He goes on to say, "it may be that the sort of abbreviations of honorific titles that feature on Roman-era coins and inscriptions made for a climate in which Christians did not find the abbreviated forms of their *nomina sacra* so strange."[11] He further comments that "the *nomina sacra* can be thought of as hybrid phenomena that uniquely combine textual and visual features and functions; these key words were written in a distinctive manner that was intended to mark them off visually (and reverentially) from the surrounding text."[12]

Regardless whether a word is written out in full or is abbreviated in accordance with *nomina sacra* practices, *it is the same word*. However, different inferences can often be drawn from the choice whether or not to use the *nomina sacra* form.

Christians who were reading the new Christian writings that soon became known as "The New Testament" were accustomed to reading the special, reverential forms of the words "Lord", "Jesus" and "Christ". When they then read the Jewish Scriptures in Greek, they were sometimes surprised when they saw the same, reverential, forms of the same words.

**Lord**

When the Jews translated their Scriptures into Greek, for the divine name יהוה, which is usually transliterated as YHWH, they used the Greek word κύριος [kurios], the basic meaning of which is "Lord". For more on this, readers are referred to the article "What is the real meaning of Matthew 6:9?", here: http://livingwater-spain.com/yhwh.pdf

During his ministry, Jesus was often addressed as "κύριος" [kurios].[13] However, at one level the word could be considered to be merely a polite form of address, indicating respect, approximately equivalent to some uses of the English word "Sir" (when it is *not* used as a formal title for someone who has been knighted). However, in Christian copies of the Septuagint the abbreviated *nomina sacra* form of the word was normally used whenever the word "kurios" referred to God, but not elsewhere. After the resurrection, Christ was routinely referred to as "the Lord" and in manuscripts of the New Testament, the *nomina sacra* form was normally used whenever the word referred to the God of the Old Testament, *and whenever it referred to Jesus Christ*.

**Jesus**

For some words that were treated as *nomina sacra*, there could be more than one *nomina sacra* form. For many words, the first letter and the last letter were used, sometimes with one or more intervening letters for some words. Hurtado refers to this as "abbreviation by "contraction"".[14] For "Jesus", the contracted form was I̅C̅.

However, the name "Jesus" was also frequently represented in *nomina sacra* form by writing the first two letters only. Hurtado refers to this as "abbreviation by "suspension"".[15] With this form, "Jesus" was written as I̅H̅.

We should note in passing that the Greek translation of the name Joshua is Ἰησοῦς [iēsous, "Jesus" or "Joshua"]. However, in both the Greek translation of Old Testament and in the New, the *nomina sacra* form is not used when the reference is to Joshua the son of Nun, only when it is a reference to Jesus of Nazareth. See Acts 7:45 and Hebrews 4:8. It is also not used in the small number of cases in the New Testament when there is another person with the name Jesus.[16]

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[10] Hurtado, op. cit., p. 99
[11] Hurtado, op. cit., p. 100
[12] Hurtado, op. cit., p. 121
[13] In whatever grammatical case was appropriate to the context.
[14] Hurtado, op. cit., p. 95
[15] Hurtado, op. cit., pp. 95-96
[16] We recognise that a small number of scribes were inconsistent in their use of *nomina sacra* forms. In spite of this, the basic pattern is clear to see. On this, see also Hurtado, op. cit., pp. 125-6. On Hebrews 4:8 in 𝔭46, see Hurtado footnote 94 on p. 126. (Subsequent research led Hurtado to withdraw the statements on 𝔭46 in the final paragraph on page 129 of the same book.)

In a very small number of manuscripts, the name Barabbas appears in Matthew 27:16 as Ἰησοῦν Βαραββᾶν ([iēsoun barabban], "Jesus Barabbas", with the accusative form of both names). "Barabbas" means "son of Abbas", and Abbas was a common name, so this man's first name may indeed have been "Jesus", although the evidence for this is weak and Christians mostly did not use it when referring to him.

In Colossians 4:11 there is a reference to Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰοῦστος [iēsous ho legomenos Ioustos][17], "Jesus, who is called Justus" (NIV). It is clear that early on in New Testament times, Christians sought to reserve use of the name "Jesus" for Jesus of Nazareth and so they gave a new, alternative, name to believers who had been named "Jesus" at birth. This practice of not giving the name "Jesus" to children has for centuries been followed in the English-speaking world, but not in the Spanish-speaking world, where "Jesús" is a common name for a boy.

## Christ

To translate the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ (Mašíaḥ, messiah), meaning "[one who is] anointed", the translators who produced the Septuagint used the Greek word Χριστὸς ["Christos", Christ], which means "anointed one".[18] There are many references to God's "anointed one" in the Old Testament, so in the Greek version of the Scriptures the word Χριστὸς ["Christos"] (or one of the inflected forms with a different final letter) is often found. Obviously, not all Old Testament references to God's "anointed one" implied a reference to a future Messiah; they could merely be referring to the king or to some other person on earth at that time who had been anointed with oil as a sign that they had been chosen by God to fulfil a particular role, for example, as king or as a prophet.

However, over a period of centuries prior to the time of Jesus of Nazareth, the Jewish people had come to expect the future coming of a מָשִׁיחַ (Mašíaḥ, messiah), or Χριστὸς ["Christos", Christ] and it was a core belief of the Christian believers that Jesus of Nazareth was that Christ whose coming had been foretold over the centuries in the Jewish Scriptures. They therefore clearly saw references to him in the Greek translation of those Scriptures.

## Numerals

The second writing convention that we need to consider is how numbers were recorded in Greek.

Centuries before Arabic numerals reached European countries, the Greeks had a way to represent numbers that avoided the need to spell out each word in full. The first letter of the Greek alphabet, A, alpha, = 1, the second letter, B beta, = 2, etc. Ten is I, iota. Eleven is therefore iota alpha, IA, and twelve, a number that occurs frequently in the New Testament (see "the twelve", etc.) is iota beta, IB. One hundred is P, rho, 200 is Σ, sigma, which at that time was written with the shape C, and 300 is T, tau, etc. To show that these letters represent numbers, a bar was written above them. Here is a summary of a few Greek numerals, as they were sometimes written in biblical manuscripts and other texts:

| Arabic numeral | Greek numeral | Arabic numeral | Greek numeral |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ⲁ̄ | 11 | ΙⲀ̄ |
| 2 | B̄ | 12 | ΙB̄ |
| 3 | Γ̄ | 18 | ΙH̄ |
| 4 | Δ̄ | 100 | P̄ |
| 8 | H̄ | 200 | C̄ |
| 10 | Ī | 300 | T̄ |

*Examples of Greek letters used for numerals*

Writing numerals in this way, as opposed to spelling out the words, was optional. Some manuscripts have the Greek numerals, some have the words written out in full. Most have a mixture, with one form in some places and the other form in other places. These optional variations account for many of the so-called "variants" between manuscripts that are referred to by those who claim that not all Bible manuscripts are

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[17] "Novum Testamentum Graece", 28th Revised Edition, also known as "Nestle-Aland 28" or "NA28", copyright © 2012 Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart

[18] See, for instance, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_(title)#:~:text=Christ%20comes%20from%20the%20Greek,one%20who%20is%5D%20anointed%22. Accessed on 12.11.21.

the same and that therefore the biblical text is unreliable or has been changed. This indicates nothing of the sort. Likewise, in English or other languages, numbers can be written as numerals or words, without changing the meaning in any way.

We can now look at two examples from the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures. The first includes the words "Lord" and "Christ". The second refers to "the Cross" and to "Jesus".

### Psalm 2:1 – 2

NIV Anglicised edition:
"Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? [2] The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the <u>LORD</u> and against his <u>anointed</u>."

Rahlfs-Hanhart "Septuaginta" in a modern Greek font:
ἵνα τί ἐφρύαξαν ἔθνη καὶ λαοὶ ἐμελέτησαν κενά [2] παρέστησαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες συνήχθησαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ κατὰ τοῦ <u>κυρίου</u> καὶ κατὰ τοῦ <u>χριστοῦ</u> αὐτοῦ

NETS:
"Why did nations grow insolent, and peoples contemplate vain things? [2] The kings of the earth stood side by side, and the rulers gathered together, against the <u>Lord</u> and against his <u>anointed</u>."

In a Greek font from the first five centuries of the Christian era:
ΙΝΑ ΤΙ ΕΦΡΥΑΞΑΝ ΕΘΝΗ ΚΑΙ ΛΑΟΙ ΕΜΕΛΕΤΗСΑΝ ΚΕΝΑ [2] ΠΑΡΕСΤΗСΑΝ ΟΙ ΒΑСΙΛΕΙС ΤΗС ΓΗС ΚΑΙ ΟΙ ΑΡΧΟΝΤΕС СΥΝΗΧΘΗСΑΝ ΕΠΙ ΤΟ ΑΥΤΟ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟΥ $\overline{\text{ΚΥ}}$ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟΥ $\overline{\text{ΧΥ}}$ ΑΥΤΟΥ

At the time that this manuscript copy was made, putting spaces between words was rare. We have however here and in the subsequent examples introduced spaces, to make the text a little easier to read, for those who have some familiarity with Koiné Greek.

Translation (by the present author):
"For what purpose did the nations [or Gentiles] become insolent and the people thought about foolish [or vain] things? [2] The kings of the earth stood by and the leaders gathered together against the <u>Lord</u> and against his <u>Christ</u>."

As perceived by the earliest Christians, this text must have looked something like this:
ΙΝΑ ΤΙ ΕΦΡΥΑΞΑΝ ΕΘΝΗ ΚΑΙ ΛΑΟΙ ΕΜΕΛΕΤΗСΑΝ ΚΕΝΑ [2] ΠΑΡΕСΤΗСΑΝ ΟΙ ΒΑСΙΛΕΙС ΤΗС ΓΗС ΚΑΙ ΟΙ ΑΡΧΟΝΤΕС СΥΝΗΧΘΗСΑΝ ΕΠΙ ΤΟ ΑΥΤΟ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟΥ <span style="color:red">$\overline{\text{ΚΥ}}$</span> ΚΑΙ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟΥ <span style="color:red">$\overline{\text{ΧΥ}}$</span> ΑΥΤΟΥ

Although red lettering was used for some words or lines of text in some manuscripts, the above two words were not routinely written in red ink. However, red has been used here to simulate the probable visual impact on early Christians of seeing the words "Lord" and "Christ" in this "Old Testament" text.

Many further examples could be given.

### Genesis 14:14

Our second example looks at lettering that was understood by at least two influential early Christian believers to mean "the Cross" and "Jesus."

NIV Anglicised Edition:
"When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan."

Rahlfs-Hanhart "Septuaginta" in a modern Greek font:
ἀκούσας δὲ Αβραμ ὅτι ᾐχμαλώτευται Λωτ ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ ἠρίθμησεν τοὺς ἰδίους οἰκογενεῖς αὐτοῦ τριακοσίους δέκα καὶ ὀκτώ καὶ κατεδίωξεν ὀπίσω αὐτῶν ἕως Δαν
*three hundred  ten    and eight*

NETS:
"And when Abram heard that his kinsman Lot had been taken captive, he counted his own homebreds, three hundred eighteen, and chased after them as far as Dan."

In a Greek font from the first five centuries of the Christian era:

ΑΚΟΥϹΑϹ ΔΕ ΑΒΡΑΜ ΟΤΙ ΗΧΜΑΛΩΤΕΥΤΑΙ ΛΩΤ Ο ΑΔΕΛΦΟϹ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΗΡΙΘΜΗϹΕΝ ΤΟΥϹ ΙΔΙΟΥϹ ΟΙΚΟΓΕΝΕΙϹ ΑΥΤΟΥ Τ ΙΗ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΤΕΔΙΩΞΕΝ ΟΠΙϹΩ ΑΥΤΩΝ ΕΩϹ ΔΑΝ

*3 18*

We will look at the significance of this passage after a brief introduction to the "Epistle of Barnabas."

**The Epistle of Barnabas**

The "Epistle of Barnabas" is a very early Christian devotional document whose composition was dated by von Weizsäcker at between 70 and approximately 130 A.D.[19]  Holmes assigns to it virtually identical dates: "after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70 (16.3 – 5) but before the city was rebuilt by Hadrian following the revolt of AD 132 – 135."[20]  Apart from in the title, the identity of the author of this "epistle" is unknown, but he is now believed not to have been the Barnabas who accompanied the Apostle Paul.  Whether or not he was another Barnabas or even had a different name but chose to write under the pseudonym "Barnabas" we do not know.  This is, however, not relevant for our consideration of what he wrote.  For simplicity of reference, we will here refer to him as Barnabas.

"The Epistle of Barnabas" became very popular among early Christians and was widely copied and read as a source of teaching and encouragement for believers, as well as being used in debates with Jews.

In the short passage that we consider here, Barnabas is clearly very excited.  When he was reading the book of Genesis in the Septuagint Greek translation, not only did the name "Jesus" jump out at him in an unexpected place, but also a symbol for the Cross on which Jesus died, and so he shared this discovery with his readers, who were in the first instance other Christians.

Here is what he wrote:

"**7** Learn abundantly, therefore, children of love, about everything: Abraham, who first instituted circumcision, looked forward in the spirit to Jesus, when he circumcised, having received the teaching of the three letters. **8** … As for the "ten and eight", the I is ten and the H is eight; thus you have "Jesus." And because the cross, which is shaped like the T, was destined to convey grace, it mentions also the "three hundred."  So he reveals Jesus in the two letters, and the cross in the other one."[21]

Barnabas clearly did not go back to the original verse before writing about it.  He remembered how seeing the number 318 had impacted him, but not precisely what the verse said about Abraham and the 318 men.  This lack of precision is common in quotations made by the early "church fathers".  Perhaps when writing they did not always have available to consult a copy of the Scriptures that they had read, and so they had to rely on their memory.  However, this does not change the core meaning of what Barnabas writes, which is all about the visual impact on him of the numeral 318 in the Greek numbering system.

Genesis 14:14 as originally seen by the author of the Epistle of Barnabas apparently gave him this impression:

ΑΚΟΥϹΑϹ ΔΕ ΑΒΡΑΜ ΟΤΙ ΗΧΜΑΛΩΤΕΥΤΑΙ ΛΩΤ Ο ΑΔΕΛΦΟϹ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΗΡΙΘΜΗϹΕΝ ΤΟΥϹ ΙΔΙΟΥϹ ΟΙΚΟΓΕΝΕΙϹ ΑΥΤΟΥ <span style="color:red">Τ ΙΗ</span> ΚΑΙ ΚΑΤΕΔΙΩΞΕΝ ΟΠΙϹΩ ΑΥΤΩΝ ΕΩϹ ΔΑΝ

*3 18*

Again, red has been used here to simulate the visual impact on early Christians of seeing these numerals in the "Old Testament" text.

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[19] Karl Heinrich von Weizsäcker, Tübingen: Rector und Akademischer Senat der Kòniglichen Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen, Gedruckt bei Ludwig Friedrich Fues, 1863, "Zur Kritik Des Barnabasbriefes Aus Dem Codex Sinaiticus"

[20] Holmes, Holmes, Michael W, "The Apostolic Fathers: Greek texts and English Translations", 3rd edition, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007, p. 373

[21] Holmes, op. cit., p. 409.  Barnabas 9:7-8.  Translation by Michael W Holmes.  The Greek text in Holmes is:
μάθετε οὖν, τέκνα ἀγάπης, περὶ πάντων πλουσίως, ὅτι Ἀβραάμ, πρῶτος περιτομήν δούς, ἐν πνεύματι προβλέψας εἰς τὸν Ἰησοῦν περιέτεμεν, λαβὼν τριῶν γραμμάτων δόγματα. 8 λέγει γάρ· Καὶ περιέτεμεν Ἀβραάμ ἐκ τοῦ οἴκου αὐτῶ ἄνδρας δεκαοκτὼ καὶ τριακοσίους. τίς οὖν ἡ δοθεῖσα αὐτῶ γνῶσις; μάθετε ὅτι τοὺς δεκαοκτὼ πρώτους, καὶ διάστημα ποιήσας λέγει τριακοσίους. τὸ δεκαοκτώ, Ι δέκα, Η ὀκτώ· ἔχεις Ἰησοῦν. ὅτι δὲ ὁ σταυρὸς ἐν τῷ Τ ἤμελλεν ἔχειν τὴν χάριν, λέγει καὶ τριακοσίους. δηλοῖ οὖν τὸν μὲν Ἰησοῦν ἐν τοῖς δυσὶν γράμμασιν, καὶ ἐν τῷ ἑνὶ τὸν σταυρόν. (p. 408)

So we observe that what Barnabas saw was a symbol, ⊤, that for him meant the cross, followed by the name "Jesus". This is because the numeral "18" written in Greek letters, I͞H, is identical in form with a common *nomina sacra* form of the name "Jesus", I͞H.

The explanation given by Barnabas has been widely misunderstood by some writers who seem to believe that we have here a case of "numerology" or "gematria", in which letters are given numerical values that have an unexpected or even mystical significance. Such certainly does not seem to be the case in this instance. Barnabas is not "interpreting" numbers nor is he giving them a special, "spiritual" or "magical" significance. He is also not assigning a special "value" to the numeral "18". He is simply reporting on the <u>*physical shape*</u> of the Greek letters used for number "three hundred and eighteen" and how they impacted him as being a visual reference to the Cross and to Jesus. He is also arguing throughout his epistle that the Christians are the true inheritors if God's covenant with Israel, so the "Old Testament" is full of references to Christ's coming and to his death on the cross.

Hurtado informs us that another early Christian writer, Clement of Alexandria, also saw the same significance in the Greek numeral form of "318" in Genesis 14:14.[22]

Today most people would not consider that in Genesis 14:14 there is a "hidden reference" to the Cross and to Jesus, but we do see that when early Christians such as Barnabas read this text in the Greek, the shape of the letter tau (⊤) and conventional way of writing the numeral "18" (I͞H) made them immediately think of the cross and of Jesus.

What is its significance to us?

1. It shows us that early Christians were seeing references to Christ throughout the Old Testament, even beyond those passages clearly understood to be prophecies about the coming of the Messiah/Christ or his suffering and death.
2. It is probably <u>the earliest historical reference to the shape of the cross</u>. We do of course know that Jesus was crucified on a cross and that a cross was precisely that: a vertical piece of wood with a horizontal bar crossing it near the top. In some cases, that horizontal bar was so high that the "cross" was in fact a T shape, as referred to by Barnabas. However, this was often not the case, and we know that the cross on which Jesus was crucified was indeed a true cross shape, as we are told in the gospels that Pontius Pilate had a sign nailed to the cross <u>*above Christ's head*</u>. See Matthew 27:37, Luke 23:38.
3. This is yet further evidence that the Jehovah's Witness claim that Christ was not crucified on a cross but on a vertical "torture stake" with no horizontal bar, goes against extremely early evidence. They claim that the idea of a "cross" was adopted by the Emperor Constantine and imposed on the church in 325 A.D., but the Epistle of Barnabas was written between two hundred and two hundred and fifty years before then. For more on this, see the article "Did Christ die on a cross or a stake?", here: http://livingwater-spain.com/crucfixn.pdf [23]
4. It shows us that the early Christians were seeing references to the Cross of Christ in all sorts of everyday objects and even in the shape of letters of the alphabet. Perhaps modern Christians could learn from this emphasis by early Christians on the Cross of Christ and the presence of Jesus as Lord.

<div align="right">22.11.21.</div>

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[22] Hurtado, op. cit., p. 114 Hurtado gives the reference in the writings of Clement as "Strom. 6.278-80." This is Stromata Book 6, Chapter 11. Clement was apparently born in approximately the year 150 AD. He reportedly died c. 215 AD. See the Wikipedia entry https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clement_of_Alexandria (accessed on 16.11.21.). He therefore wrote approximately a century after the author of "The Epistle of Barnabas".
[23] Accessed on 12.11.21.