

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php

The Salutation of Barnabas

EDGAR J. GOODSPEED
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE salutation at the beginning of the Epistle of Barnabas, "Hail, sons and daughters (*Χαίρετε, υιοὶ καὶ θυγατέρες*), in the name of the Lord who has loved us, in peace" has always seemed rather at variance with the epistolary title and the occasional epistolary touches in the letter, e. g. "I have hastened to send you a short (letter)", 1 5. "Sons and daughters" is not a usual way of designating the recipients of a letter in the salutation: it is too vague for Greek epistolary feeling, and it should be the dative, not the vocative. But the latter is required here by the accompanying imperative, *Χαίρετε*. The expression "Hail" or "Rejoice" (*Χαίρετε*) followed by a vocative "Sons and daughters" is properly a form of direct address, used by persons face to face with each other. Thus Telemachus addresses Athene, "Hail, stranger!" (*Χαίρε, ξένη*, Od. 1 123). Judas says to Jesus, "Hail, rabbi!" (*Χαίρε ῥαββεί*, Mt. 26 49, cf. Lk. 1 28). Rhoda says to Hermas, "Hermas, hail!" (*Ἐρμῆ, χαίρε*, Vis. 1 1, 4); Trypho to Justin, "Philosopher, hail!" (*Φιλόσοφε, χαίρε*, Dial. 1 1). The parallels suggest that Barnabas begins more like a sermon than an epistle.

On second thought, however, it is not altogether natural for a preacher to address his hearers with this ancient "How do you do?" or "Good morning". The ancient models are "Brethren", "My brethren", "Beloved" in the homily-epistles, and in the Acts, "Brethren and fathers", or "Men of Athens". But the fact remains that "Hail, sons and daughters" even if it be no proper way to open a sermon is a most unusual manner of beginning a letter.

The New Testament epistolary forms, of course, stand rather apart from Greek usage. Paul at least shows what is apparently Jewish influence in his habitual "Grace to you, and peace". The epistles of Peter accompany these words with the optative "be multiplied" (*πληθυνθείη*). Jude uses the same construction: "Mercy to you and peace and love be multiplied", while 2 and 3 John have only the names of writer and recipient: "The Elder unto Gaius the beloved whom I love in truth". "Grace, mercy, peace" is used in 1 and 2 Timothy, and "grace and peace" in Titus. Only James shows the usual Greek epistolary form: "James . . . to the twelve tribes . . . greeting" (*χαίρειν*). The letter of the Jerusalem church to the Greek churches given in Acts 15, also begins in true Greek style: "The apostles to the brethren . . . greeting" (*χαίρειν* 15 23). That the New Testament letters most truly Greek in form should be these two, is strange and significant.

Of the Apostolic Fathers, Clement, like Peter, uses "Grace and peace be multiplied to you", and Polycarp, "Mercy and peace . . . be multiplied to you". Ignatius, however, uses the strict Greek formula *πλεῖστα χαίρειν* ("Ignatius . . . to Polycarp . . . heartiest greeting"), though sometimes a good deal embroidered.

With or without *πλεῖστα*, this is the form of salutation found in hundreds of papyrus letters of both Ptolemaic and Roman periods. "Zois to Ischyron her brother, greeting" (*χαίρειν*) is the ever recurring type, varied now and then with "heartiest greeting" (*πλεῖστα χαίρειν* or rarely *πολλὰ χαίρειν*, O. P. 1296). Sometimes "and perpetual health" (*καὶ διὰ παντὸς ὑγιαίνειν*) is added (O. P. 294, A. D. 22). Sometimes there is no greeting: "Sarmates to his own Dioscorus" (O. P. 1297); "To Stephanus from Hephaestion" (O. P. 1065). Once *ἐν ψυχῇ* (O. P. 115) occurs for *χαίρειν*, recalling the Platonic *εὖ πράττειν*. But these exceptions are decidedly rare. The ordinary mechanism of salutation in the papyrus letters is "Theon to Tyrannus *χαίρειν*".

But some letters among the papyri offer striking parallels to the construction in Barnabas. The Marburg papyrus letters published by Eisner (Papyri Iandanae, fasc. 2, 1913) in-

clude one, no. 12, of the third or fourth century after Christ, beginning

Χαίροις Ἀφυμοῦ παρὰ Σωιρίδος.

Here as in Barnabas the verb is second person instead of infinitive, but it is in the optative not the imperative. This is very like O. P. 933, of the second century:

Χαίροις, κύριέ μου Ἀπολῳάριε παρὰ Διογένους φίλου.

O. P. 1063, of the second or third century, is much closer to Barnabas:

Χαίροις, τέκνον Ἀμοί.

"Greeting, my son Amois!" Here the writer does not mention his own name, and does not need to, as he is writing to his own son. The address on the *verso* may have contained it. A still closer resemblance to the Barnabas salutation appears in the Berlin *Griechische Urkunden*, 821, of the second century:

Χαίρε, κύριέ μου πάτερ, Ἡραίσκος σε ἀσπάζομαι

"Hail, my lord father! I Heraiscus salute thee!"

The chief peculiarities in the epistolary salutation of Barnabas are interestingly met by these two letters. As in the former of them the writer of Barnabas leaves himself unnamed but would be identified to his readers by the relationship to them, of course spiritual, that he claims. As in the latter, the direct imperative is used, and the recipients are designated only in terms of relationship. It will be remembered that Africanus' famous letter to Origen begins with *Χαίρε*. But perhaps the best parallel of all to Barnabas is afforded by Fayum Papyri 129, of the third century:

Χαίρε, κύριε τιμώτατε.

Here the salutation names neither writer nor recipients and consists simply of the imperative *Χαίρε* with the vocative "honored sir". This is structurally at least precisely as in Barnabas. The *verso* has *Σερήνη ἐπίδος*, "Deliver to Serenus", and in like manner the real address probably stood on the *verso* of the original roll of the Epistle of Barnabas. On the whole these letters satisfy the epistolary peculiarities of Barnabas surprisingly well. They belong to the same general period with it,

coming from the second or third century, while it was written about 130 *A. D.* And if, as many have thought, Barnabas was written in Egypt, the evidence of these Egyptian letters is all the more competent.

Some scholars have explained these uses of *χαίρε* and *χαίρους* in letter salutations of the Roman period as due to want of culture on the part of the writers.¹ Eisner thinks them rather intimate modes of salutation, natural between father and son or between brothers. Most though not all of the letters of this kind are from one member of a family to another. With this explanation the use of this form in Barnabas falls in very well. The Christian teacher addresses his disciples as his children, and the informal domestic salutation is a natural incident to this address. It is furthermore a strong hint of the genuinely epistolary character of the document, for if the salutation were an accretion or a pretence, a more conventional form would certainly have been employed.

On the whole it seems clear that the salutation at the beginning of Barnabas, so far from being a sermonic or homiletical touch, is genuinely and demonstrably epistolary, and fits perfectly with Egypt and the second century.

¹ Ziemann has collected examples of the *Χαίρε* type, from the second to the fourth century after Christ (*De epistularum Graecarum formulis*, 1911). From the second come Lond. III p. 208, no. 899 (*Χ[αίρε τ]έκνον Ἄρσει ἀπὸ Ἐρμαίου πατρὸς*); B. G. U. III, 821; Rein. 48, and Barnabas; from the second or third B. G. U. II 435 (*Χαίρε Οὐαλεριανὲ παρὰ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ*); from the third, Fayum 129, and Julius Africanus to Origen; and from the third or fourth O. P. 122.