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ISRAEL AND GOD'S ESCHATOLOGICAL AGENT
IN THE TESTAMENTS OF THE TWELVE PATRIARCHS

Harm W. Hollander

1. *Introduction*

When the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Romans in the year 56, he found it necessary to deal rather extensively with the role of the people of Israel in God's plan of salvation. Actually, the entire letter is not only an introduction of the apostle to the Christian community of Rome, but it reflects at the same time Paul's care for Israel and the Jews. He had experienced their refusal to accept his message of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Only a few Jews had become Christians; the majority of the members of the Christian communities in the diaspora were of heathen origin.

In chapters 9-11 in particular Paul discusses God's election of Israel, their negative attitude to the Gospel, the salvation of the Gentiles, and Israel's final restoration. He expresses the certainty that, although the people of Israel as a whole have rejected Jesus Christ, they will nonetheless be restored at the end of times. For history has shown over and over again that after a period of sinfulness, lawlessness, and disobedience on the side of Israel, it was always God who showed mercy towards his chosen people. And the apostle is convinced that history will repeat itself: 'a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved ($\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ 'Ισραὴλ σωθήσεται)...' (11:25-26). He does not go into the manner or the condition of Israel's final restoration. So it remains unclear whether or not he thinks of a future repentance and acceptance of and belief in Jesus Christ as the saviour of the world as an essential condition for their final salvation.¹ Confronted with Israel's actual refusal to accept the Gospel, the apostle simply expresses his conviction that God will not break his promises to his chosen people and that he will have mercy upon them and save them at the end.

Israel's role in God's plan for the salvation of mankind and their rejection of Jesus Christ remained a favourite issue in Christian reflection in the first and

¹ On these verses, see further E.P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, Minneapolis 1983, 192-8.

second centuries. Some hundred years after Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, the apologist Justin Martyr composed his *Dialogue with Trypho*. This treatise describes a meeting of (the Christian) Justin and (the Jew) Trypho, who discuss the Christian message of Jesus as the promised Messiah. Justin makes a plea for the reliability of the Gospel and refutes all Trypho's arguments against Christianity. Their common point of departure is the Scriptures (the OT writings), but their interpretations of a number of passages differ considerably. The same can be said of their differing concepts of the Mosaic Law, the Torah. For the Christian Justin, the Law can be divided into three parts: 1. the ethical part of the law, involving eternal and universal principles, 2. the predictive aspect of the law, foretelling the coming of Jesus Christ, and 3. those commandments ordained by God as a kind of historical dispensation for the Jews because of their stubbornness and hardness of heart.² Justin emphasizes in his discussions with Trypho that, since the coming of Jesus Christ, the third part of the Mosaic Law, consisting of the ritual ordinances like circumcision, fasting, sacrifice, and sabbath observance, is no longer valid. In fact, it did not belong to the eternal, natural law of God before (Abraham and) Moses either. The new law of Jesus Christ is none other than the eternal law that was also valid in pre-Mosaic times. Interpreting the Scriptures Justin argues that the time of the Mosaic Law is passed and that the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is foretold in a number of passages in the Jews' own Holy Book.

This central theme in the *Dialogue with Trypho* has made many scholars assume that, although primarily written for Christian readers, this book was also intended for a Jewish audience. And indeed, much can be said in favour of such an assumption.³ If this is true, the *Dialogue with Trypho* can be regarded as one of the second century Christian efforts to present Jesus Christ and the Gospel to the Jews with the aim of convincing them of the Christian truth.⁴

A similar conclusion is also claimed for another second century writing, namely, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, or at least for the obviously Christian passages in them.⁵ With regard to the history of the research of this

² On this tripartite division of the Law, see esp. Th. Stylianopoulos, *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law* (SBLDS 20), Missoula 1975, 51-76.

³ Th. Stylianopoulos, *Justin Martyr*, 33-44, 169-95.

⁴ Cf. also G.N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People. Studies in Matthew*, Edinburgh 1992, esp. ch. 10, 'Aspects of Early Christian - Jewish Polemic and Apologetic' (pp. 232-55).

⁵ See J. Jervell, 'Ein Interpolator interpretiert. Zu der christlichen Bearbeitung der Testamente der Zwölf Patriarchen', in C. Burchard-J. Jervell-Joh. Thomas, *Studien zu den Testamenten der zwölf Patriarchen* (BZNW 36), Berlin 1969, 30-61, who is of the opinion that the parenthesis in *T. 12 Patr.* is to be interpreted as a 'Bußwort an Israel' and that the Christian passages are meant as an attempt, 'das Judentum zu überzeugen' (pp. 51-54, 61); and, though

writing, many students of *T. 12 Patr.* have analysed the text with the help of the method of literary criticism in an attempt to reconstruct the history of the writing. By distinguishing different stages in the making of *T. 12 Patr.*, they are eagerly looking for the oldest layer or *Grundschrift*, an assumedly Jewish document, most probably written in Hebrew or Aramaic in the second century B.C.⁶ On the whole, however, these scholars have suggested completely different conclusions as to the history of *T. 12 Patr.*, which shows, in my opinion, the impossibility to apply our modern expectation of consistency to an ancient writing which fulfilled different criteria of consistency than our modern criteria. It cannot be questioned that the author, composer, or redactor of *T. 12 Patr.* used all kinds of written and oral materials. But to trace the development of traditions before and during the genesis of the writing seems impossible.⁷ Therefore I prefer not to try to remove all the so-called Christian 'interpolations' and 'alterations' as well as Jewish-Hellenistic 'additions' in order to find the 'original' text of *T. 12 Patr.* Rather, I prefer a more direct approach. Namely, to analyse the text of *T. 12 Patr.* as it lies before us and to investigate the meaning it had both for the Christian author, composer, or redactor, as well as for the receptors living in a second century A.D. Hellenistic environment.⁸

It is in the obviously Christian passages, which have been investigated with relatively little vigour since they are usually regarded as interpolations which do not deserve to be analysed at all, that we find phrases about Israel's attitude

more prudently, M. de Jonge, 'The Pre-Mosaic Servants of God in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and in the Writings of Justin and Irenaeus', *VigChr* 39 (1985) 157-70 (=M. de Jonge, *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian Christology and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* [NT.S 63], Leiden 1991, 263-76), esp. p. 169 (=275): 'They (= the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs) were not necessarily written as a missionary tractate addressed to the Jews, but they are certainly concerned with the fate of the Jews and want to convince them (and the Christians, who read this book and handed it down) that they are called to serve God, also after the coming of Jesus Christ...'; cf. M. de Jonge, 'The Future of Israel in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs', *JSJ* 17 (1986) 196-211 (= M. de Jonge, *Jewish Eschatology*, 164-179), esp. p. 211 (=179).

⁶ The most recent literary critical attempt to analyse *T. 12 Patr.* this way is found in J.L. Ulrichsen, *Die Grundschrift der Testamente der zwölf Patriarchen. Eine Untersuchung zu Umfang, Inhalt und Eigenart der ursprünglichen Schrift* (AUU 10), Stockholm 1991.

⁷ So also M. de Jonge, 'The Main Issues in the Study of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs', *NTS* 26 (1980) 508-24 (= M. de Jonge, *Jewish Eschatology*, 147-63); *idem*, 'The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Christian and Jewish. A Hundred Years after Friedrich Schnapp', *NedThT* 39 (1985) 265-75 (= M. de Jonge, *Jewish Eschatology*, 233-43).

⁸ See further H.W. Hollander-M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. A Commentary* (SVTP 8) Leiden 1985, esp. the *Introduction*, pp. 1-85.

towards God's eschatological agent⁹ and her future destiny at the end of times. An investigation of these more or less polemical passages may help to find an answer to the question whether *T. 12 Patr.* as a whole, or at least in their final Christian form, are to be regarded as another second century Christian attempt to convince the Jews of the Christian truth. In other words: Were the intended readers of *T. 12 Patr.* only Christians or were they Jews (and Christians)? In the following paragraphs I hope to make it plausible that *T. 12 Patr.* may have been written without any missionary purpose at all, but that they have been composed by and for Christians, who were thought to be in need of some moral exhortation in order to practise a truly Christian life. The disobedience and unbelief on the side of Israel is no more than a striking example of ungodly behaviour.

2. *T. 12 Patr. as a series of farewell discourses*

The pseudepigraphon *T. 12 Patr.* consists of twelve parts or 'testaments', each containing the last words of one of the twelve sons of Jacob addressed to his sons (and other relatives) at the end of his life. The farewell speech itself, preceded by some phrases about the circumstances under which the speech is delivered, and followed by some statements about the patriarch's death and burial, forms the bulk of each testament. It usually has a tripartite structure: the patriarch tells his sons first about his own life in the past and describes his own moral behaviour; next, he exhorts them not to fall into the same sins or, if he has been a virtuous man, to imitate him; and finally, he foretells what will happen to his posterity and the people of Israel (and the Gentiles) in the future.

In the literary genre of the testament (or better, the genre of the farewell discourse¹⁰), the emphasis lies undeniably upon the parenthesis.¹¹ And *T. 12 Patr.* are no exception to the rule.¹² Not only the structure but also the extent of the

⁹ Strikingly, the title 'Messiah' (ὁ χριστός) for the eschatological agent of God is lacking in *T. 12 Patr.*; on *T. Reub.* 6:8, where we find the expression 'of the anointed high priest (ἀρχιερέως χριστοῦ) of whom the Lord spoke', see the note in H.W. Hollander-M. de Jonge, *Commentary*, 107.

¹⁰ Cf. E. Cortès, *Los Discursos de Adiós de Gn 49 a Jn 13-17. Pistas para la historia de un género literario en la antigua literatura judía*, Barcelona 1976, 70, 170 n. 33.

¹¹ See H.W. Hollander, *Joseph as an ethical model in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (SVTP 6), Leiden 1981, 1-12 (and the literature mentioned there).

¹² See H.W. Hollander, *Joseph*, 6-12, and esp. p. 100 n. 18; cf. also M. de Jonge, *Pre-Mosaic Servants*, and *idem*, 'Die Paränese in den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und in den Testamenten der Zwölf Patriarchen', *Neues Testament und Ethik*. FS R. Schnackenburg (ed. H.

parenetic passages in *T. 12 Patr.* make it clear that the parenesis is the focal point. Neither the biographical section, which is undoubtedly intended to illustrate the exhortations with which the biographical data are connected, nor the phrases about the future seem to play an important role in *T. 12 Patr.* The question whether the predictions of the future have been added by the author of *T. 12 Patr.* only for their own sake, due to the fact that such predictions are an integral element of farewell discourses, or whether they have been added for the benefit of the parenetic purpose of the author, as further illustrations of moral behaviour or misbehaviour, is a very legitimate question.

3. *The predictions of the future*

In the predictions of the future found in *T. 12 Patr.* we are able to distinguish four types of passages, unevenly distributed over the individual testaments and adapted to the different contexts. The first and most important type is the S(in)-E(xile)-R(eturn) pattern: the patriarch refers to future sins of his posterity, which will be followed by God's punishment (*viz.* exile and captivity among the Gentiles). The exile finally ends in their return from captivity due to God's mercy and compassion on them.¹³

Next, there are the so-called L(evi)-J(udah) passages. In these sections, the sons of the patriarchs are exhorted not to rebel against the posterity of Levi (and Judah), but rather to obey or to love him (them), either because of the special position of Levi (and Judah) among the Israelites or because 'the salvation of the Lord' is said to come out of (one of) these tribes.¹⁴

The third type of predictions of the future is found in passages in which the patriarch refers to a future ideal saviour figure.¹⁵ Finally, there are sections that deal with a future resurrection of the patriarchs as heads of their tribes.¹⁶ These four types of passages form the bulk of the predictions of the future, made by the patriarchs on their death-beds in the company of their sons and other relatives.

Though some patterns, in particular the S.E.R.- and the L.J. ones, may have

Merklein), Freiburg/Basel/Wien 1989, 538-50 (= M. de Jonge, *Jewish Eschatology*, 277-89).

¹³ For a detailed analysis of the S.E.R. pattern, see H.W. Hollander - M. de Jonge, *Commentary*, 39-40, 53-56.

¹⁴ See further H.W. Hollander - M. de Jonge, *Commentary*, 40-41, 56-61.

¹⁵ See H.W. Hollander - M. de Jonge, *Commentary*, 63-64.

¹⁶ See H.W. Hollander - M. de Jonge, *Commentary*, 61-63.

their roots in Judaism,¹⁷ the meaning of these passages as they appear in the farewell discourses is Christian. This is evidenced by the obviously Christian elements, which are visible in these predictions of the future. The references to Jesus Christ, though he is not mentioned by name, are numerous and clear, and they are in accordance with various aspects of second century christology.¹⁸ He is the one who is represented as the future ideal saviour, to be raised up by God as a high priest from the tribe of Levi, and as a king from the tribe of Judah.¹⁹ He will be 'God and man',²⁰ and he will save 'all the Gentiles and the race of Israel'.²¹ The call to obedience to the sons of Levi (and Judah) implies a call to obedience to 'the Lamb of God and Saviour of the world'.²²

Thus the genre of the farewell discourse enabled the author, composer, or redactor of *T. 12 Patr.* to place predictions concerning the coming of God's agent Jesus Christ into the mouths of the twelve sons of Jacob, the famous forefathers of the Jewish people.

4. The attitude of the Jewish people towards God's eschatological agent

In several instances within the predictions of the future in *T. 12 Patr.* we find utterances which foresee the future negative attitude of the Jewish people towards God's agent, Jesus Christ. It is the patriarch Levi in particular who speaks about the crimes of his posterity against 'the Saviour of the world'. He mentions the theme more than once in his farewell discourse. In *T. Levi* 4:4, for instance, he foretells how the sons of his sons 'will lay hands upon him (= Jesus) to do away with him'.²³

Somewhat later, Levi declares that he is innocent of their 'ungodliness and

¹⁷ Cf. Th. Korteweg, 'The meaning of Naphtali's visions', *Studies on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Text and Interpretation*, ed. M. de Jonge (SVTP 3), Leiden 1975, 260-90, esp. pp. 282-90.

¹⁸ See the early-Christian parallels mentioned in H.W. Hollander-M. de Jonge, *Commentary*, ad loc.

¹⁹ See *T. Sim.* 7:2; *T. Levi* 2:11; 8:14; 18; *T. Dan* 5:10; *T. Gad* 8:1; *T. Jos.* 19; and cf. *T. Reub.* 6:12; *T. Judah* 22:3; 24.

²⁰ See *T. Sim.* 7:2; and cf. *T. Sim.* 6:5,7; *T. Judah* 24:1; *T. Napht.* 4:5; *T. Asher* 7:3; *T. Benj.* 10:7.

²¹ See *T. Sim.* 6:5,7; 7:1,2; *T. Levi* 2:11; 10:2; 14:2; *T. Judah* 22:2; *T. Zeb.* 9:8; *T. Dan* 5:10; 6:7,9; *T. Napht.* 8:3; *T. Gad* 8:1; *T. Asher* 7:3; *T. Jos.* 19:6; *T. Benj.* 3:8; 9:2; 10:5.

²² *T. Benj.* 3:8. On this verse, see esp. M. de Jonge, 'Test. Benjamin 3:8 and the Picture of Joseph as "a Good and Holy Man"', *Die Entstehung der jüdischen Martyrologie*, ed. J.W. van Henten (SPB 38), Leiden 1989, 204-214 (= M. de Jonge, *Jewish Eschatology*, 290-300).

²³ Text: *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, ed. M. de Jonge, in cooperation with H.W. Hollander, H.J. de Jonge and Th. Korteweg (PVTG 1.2), Leiden 1978; translations: H.W. Hollander - M. de Jonge, *Commentary*.

transgression (ἀσεβείας ... καὶ παραβάσεως)', which they 'will commit at the consummation of the ages against the Saviour of the world, acting impiously (ἀσεβοῦντες), leading Israel astray (πλανῶντες τὸν Ἰσραήλ) ...' (*T. Levi* 10:2).

The same theme recurs in chapter 14, where the patriarch tells his sons, '...that at the end you will act impiously (ἀσεβήσετε) against the Lord, laying hands (upon him) in all wickedness...

...also our father Israel will be pure from the ungodliness of the high priests (τῆς ἀσεβείας τῶν ἀρχιερέων), who will lay their hands upon the Saviour of the world ... wishing to kill him, teaching commandments contrary to the ordinances of God (ἐναντίας ἐντολὰς διδάσκοντες τοῖς τοῦ θεοῦ δικαίωμασι) ...' (vv. 1-4)

And finally, in chapter 16, Levi refers to his sons' future crimes against the priesthood, the sacrifices, the law, the prophets and other righteous and godly men (vv. 1-2), after which he continues as follows,

'and a man who renews the law (ἄνδρα ἀνακαινοποιοῦντα νόμον) in the power of the Most High, you will call a deceiver (πλάνον), and, at last, you will kill him, as you suppose, not knowing that he would be raised up, taking innocent blood, in wickedness, on your heads' (v. 3).

Thus, on his deathbed, the patriarch Levi foretells the future sins of his posterity. As future priests and high priests, they will deceive the people of Israel and act against the law of God, and they will kill the Saviour of the world, the one who will renew the law but whom they will call a deceiver.

Elsewhere in *T. 12 Patr.*, we find similar predictions of Israel's negative attitude towards the coming Saviour. Their behaviour will be characterized by 'provocation' (*T. Zeb.* 9:9) and 'lawlessness' (*T. Dan* 6:6), while the patriarch Asher foretells his sons that they will 'surely be disobedient to him (= Jesus) (ἀπειθοῦντες ἀπειθήσετε)' and will 'act impiously (ἀσεβοῦντες ἀσεβήσετε) towards him not giving heed to the law of God, but to commandments of men' (*T. Asher* 7:5).

Benjamin, while speaking about the future coming of God's 'salvation', tells his sons that 'he (= Jesus) will enter into the first temple, and there the Lord will be outraged (ὕβρισθήσεται) and set at nought (ἐξουθενωθήσεται) and lifted upon a tree (ἐπὶ ξύλου ὑψωθήσεται)' (*T. Benj.* 9:3).

Finally, Israel's lawless actions against the coming Saviour will be accompanied and followed by a continuous 'ignorance' and 'unbelief' in Jesus Christ.

This prediction is again attributed to some of their famous forefathers.²⁴

The consequences of Israel's future negative attitude towards 'the Saviour of the world' are twofold. First, the patriarchs foretell that, on account of this rejection, their posterity will be punished by God severely, a consequence which is in accordance with the first elements of the S.E.R. pattern.²⁵ The punishment will result this time particularly in the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the dispersion of the people of Israel among the Gentile nations:

'Because of this, the temple which the Lord will choose, will be desolate in uncleanness, and you will be captives throughout all the Gentiles' (*T. Levi* 15:1).²⁶

Thus the diaspora of the Jews is regarded as God's punishment for their crimes against his eschatological agent and their unbelief in 'the Saviour of the world'. This interpretation of the diaspora as punishment reflects once again a second century Christian view, which the author of *T. 12 Patr.* utilizes.²⁷

But Israel's refusal to accept Jesus Christ as God's Saviour will not only lead to her punishment. It will also have a positive effect; namely, God's turning to the Gentiles:

'But in the time of the lawlessness of Israel the Lord will leave them and pass to the Gentiles who do his will...' (*T. Dan* 6:6).

Contrary to the people of Israel who 'will be diminished through ignorance', the Gentiles 'will be multiplied in knowledge' (*T. Levi* 18:9). And Benjamin, at last, foretells his sons that after Jesus' death,

'...the veil of the temple will be rent,²⁸ and the spirit of God will pass on to the Gentiles, as a fire that is poured out' (*T. Benj.* 9:4).²⁹

²⁴ See *T. Levi* 18:9; *T. Benj.* 10:8.

²⁵ On the rather complicated S.E.R. passages in *T. 12 Patr.* and the repetitions of the S.E.R. pattern in several testaments together with the many evidently Christian elements connected with it, see (once more) H.W. Hollander - M. de Jonge, *Commentary*, 53-56; M. de Jonge, *Future of Israel*, 200-205 (= 168-73); cf. also G.N. Stanton, *Gospel*, 247-55.

²⁶ See further *T. Levi* 10:3-4; 14:1; 16:4-5; 18:9; *T. Zeb.* 9:9; *T. Dan* 5:13; *T. Asher* 7:6.

²⁷ See, e.g., Hippolytus, *Commentary on the Benedictions of Isaac and Jacob* 14 (161); 26 (276); Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 117:5. Cf. also M. de Jonge, 'Hippolytus' "Benedictions of Isaac, Jacob and Moses" and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs', *Bijdragen* 46 (1985) 245-60 (= M. de Jonge, *Jewish Eschatology*, 204-219), esp. p. 250 (= 209).

²⁸ On the motif of the rending of the temple-veil, see esp. M. de Jonge, 'Two Interesting Interpretations of the Rending of the Temple-Veil in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs', *Bijdragen* 46 (1985) 350-62 (= M. de Jonge, *Jewish Eschatology*, 220-31).

²⁹ Cf. also *T. Benj.* 11:2 where we find a clear reference to the missionary activities of the apostle Paul.

The notion that Israel's disobedience and unbelief have resulted in the opportunity of the Gentiles to be saved (at the end of times) is another fixed idea in early Christian literature. We find it already in the writings of the apostle Paul.³⁰ Of course, in the first and second centuries A.D., it was a daily life experience for Christians to see that the majority of the Jewish people remained unbelieving in Jesus Christ as God's Messiah, while more and more non-Jews accepted the Christian message wholeheartedly. And the early Christian authors, the author of *T. 12 Patr.* included, frequently mention this remarkable fact.

With regard to the final destiny of the people of Israel at the moment when God will judge the whole of mankind, the author of *T. 12 Patr.* does not give us a perfectly clear picture.

On the one hand, we find a prediction of a bleak future for the people of Israel, namely in *T. Benj.* 10, where the patriarch gives a description of the future resurrection and God's judgment:

'...And the Lord will judge Israel first for the unrighteousness done to him, because they did not believe that God appeared in the flesh as a deliverer... And he will convict Israel through the chosen ones of the Gentiles...' (vv. 8, 10).

Obviously, the starting-point of the author of *T. 12 Patr.* is Israel's disobedience and unbelief, which will lead to their punishment in the present time, and to their condemnation at the end.

On the other hand, however, God's eschatological agent will be 'the Saviour of the world', which includes the people of Israel.³¹ The patriarchs themselves are fully convinced that they will be raised up from death in order to rejoice together with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the saints and righteous men and those (of the Gentiles) who believed in the eschatological 'Saviour of the world'.³² They do not find it necessary to fear God's coming judgment. This motif is also a well-known second century Christian idea. For instance, Justin writes in his *Dialogue with Trypho* 26:1,

'...While the nations that have believed in Him, and have repented for all the sins they have committed - they shall inherit, with all the

³⁰ See Rom 11:11; and cf. Matt 21:43; Acts 13:46; 18:6; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 26:1; 52:4; 109:1.

³¹ See esp. *T. Sim.* 7:2; *T. Judah* 22:2; *T. Dan* 6:7; *T. Napht.* 8:3; *T. Gad* 8:1; *T. Asher* 7:3; *T. Jos.* 19:6; *T. Benj.* 3:8.

³² See *T. Sim.* 6:7; *T. Levi* 18:14; *T. Judah* 25; *T. Zeb.* 10:2; *T. Dan* 5:12; *T. Benj.* 10:6-8.

patriarchs and the prophets and the righteous men that have been born of Israel.³³

But what about all the other members of the people of Israel? According to the patriarchs, belief in Jesus Christ is an essential condition for being saved, also for the Israelites. But they do not hesitate to add that at the end of time their posterity will be received by the Lord with pity and compassion. The punishment imposed on the Israelites by God for their crime against 'the Saviour of the world', will be temporary: it will only last 'until he (= Jesus) will again visit (you) and in pity receive you through faith and water' (*T. Levi* 16:5).³⁴ In other words, their punishment will last until Jesus will receive the Israelites as people who believe in Him and have been baptised.

In contrast to Justin's *Dialogue*, for instance, where it is hoped that the Jews will come to believe in Jesus Christ, and where it is said that the Christians will pray for them that they 'may receive mercy at Christ's hands',³⁵ the author of *T. 12 Patr.* seems to be sure that one day the people of Israel will believe in Christ and will be received by him at the end of time. He is convinced that 'Israel will be gathered together unto the Lord' (*T. Benj.* 10:11),³⁶ and that 'on the day that Israel will believe, the kingdom of the enemy will be brought to an end' (*T. Dan* 6:4).

Thus, in *T. 12 Patr.*, references to the future condemnation of Israel are found alongside statements about Israel's final salvation. Apparently the author of *T. 12 Patr.* did not aim at one straight answer to the question of the future destiny of the people of Israel. Since in his opinion belief in Jesus Christ was the essential condition for salvation, at least after the coming of 'the Saviour of the world', both options were open: either 1. the Israelites will remain unbelievers and will be condemned by God together with all the Gentiles who do not believe in Jesus Christ, or 2. they will repent and turn to the Lord 'in faith and water' (*T. Levi* 16:5) and will be saved by God and gathered together with all the Gentiles who believe in Jesus Christ around 'the last temple of God' (*T. Benj.* 9:2) in Jerusalem.

The latter option is for the author of *T. 12 Patr.* the more plausible. It reminds us of Paul's words in Rom 11:26, with the difference that the author of *T. 12 Patr.* explicitly mentions Israel's future acceptance of and belief in

³³ Translation: A. Lukyn Williams, *Justin Martyr. The Dialogue with Trypho*, London 1930.

³⁴ Cf. *T. Dan* 5:13; *T. Asher* 7:7; *T. Benj.* 9:2.

³⁵ *Dialogue with Trypho* 95:3; 96:3; 142:2.

³⁶ Cf. *T. Dan* 5:13; *T. Benj.* 9:2.

Jesus Christ. But both authors share the conviction that Israel will be saved, and both seem to deal with Israel's final salvation as a more or less fixed item in a purely Christian discussion. Neither Paul nor the author of *T. 12 Patr.* give the impression that they are addressing themselves to any one other than Christian readers.

As to *T. 12 Patr.*, this assumption is strengthened by the fact that all explicit (or even implicit) exhortations to believe in 'the Saviour of the world', in particular after his death (and resurrection), are absent. Theological details about Jesus Christ's saving activities and about the Christians' right over against Judaism in order to persuade the Jews, are equally absent. There is no trace of a Christian-Jewish discussion at all. What we do find are, at best, more or less general exhortations to 'observe the commandments of the Lord and honour Judah and Levi' because of 'the salvation' which will come out of (one of) these tribes.³⁷ And when Israel's negative attitude towards the coming Saviour is described, which was of course a *vaticinium ex eventu* at the time *T. 12 Patr.* were composed, it is not followed by an exhortation to believe in Christ, but it is wholly embedded in a parenetic context in order to give another illustration of disobedience to the law of God.

That this is the case can be deduced even from *T. Levi*, a testament in which the biographical passages and the predictions of the future by far exceed the exhortatory parts.³⁸ Even here the setting of the references to Israel's future negative attitude to 'the Saviour of the world' is wholly parenetic. The prophetic utterances about Israel's impious actions against the Lord ending up in his violent death in chapter 14, for instance, are preceded by a parenetic section on the observance of the law of God in chapter 13. And most illustrative of the importance of the parenesis in *T. 12 Patr.* is the concluding paragraph of *T. Levi*, where, after having spoken of the coming Saviour and Israel's reaction (chapter 18), the patriarch Levi asks his sons to 'choose ... either darkness or light, either the law of the Lord or the works of Beliar' (19:1).

A similar picture is found in other testaments: when Israel's future refusal to accept Jesus Christ is referred to, it is connected with direct exhortations to fear the Lord and to keep his commandments.³⁹

All this implies that the references to Israel's attitude towards Jesus Christ in

³⁷ See *T. Jos.* 19:6 (cf. *T. Sim.* 7:1-2; *T. Napht.* 8:2; *T. Gad* 8:1). Cf. also *T. Asher* 7:4.

³⁸ This may be due to the amount of biographical material which the author, composer, or redactor of *T. 12 Patr.* had at his disposal (see H.W. Hollander - M. de Jonge, *Commentary*, 17-25) and to his (Christian) conception that it was the sons of Levi, the (high) priests, in particular who were responsible for the death of Jesus Christ.

³⁹ See *T. Dan* 6:6 after 6:1 and before 6:8-10, and *T. Benj.* 9, esp. v. 3, after chapters 7-8 and before 10:3.

T. 12 Patr. are simply mentioned as negative examples within a purely parenetic context. They do not serve as an invitation to the Jews to repent and to believe in Jesus Christ as 'the Saviour of the world'.

This conclusion is all the more plausible when one analyses the phrases on the role and function of God's eschatological agent in *T. 12 Patr.* They do not give us the impression that they are meant to convince the Jews of the Christian truth. Christological statements on the meaning of Jesus Christ's death (and resurrection), for instance, are absent. Instead, it is said that the future ideal figure will be 'a man who renews the law (ἀνακαινοποιούντα νόμον) in the power of the Most High' (*T. Levi* 16:3), someone who will be 'teaching the law of God (ἐκδιδάσκων ... νόμον θεοῦ) through his works' (*T. Dan* 6:9). That is, the 'Saviour of the world' will renovate the law of God and teach it through his own example.

What this means becomes clear from a number of passages in which the behaviour of 'the Saviour of the world' is described. *T. Judah* 24:1, for instance, portrays him as one who will be 'walking with the sons of men in meekness and righteousness (ἐν πραότητι καὶ δικαιοσύνη)', and in whom 'no sin whatever will be found'. He will be 'true and longsuffering, meek and lowly (ἀληθὴς καὶ μακρόθυμος, πρᾶος καὶ ταπεινός)', and he will reign 'in humility and poverty (ἐν ταπεινώσει καὶ ἐν πτωχείᾳ)' (*T. Dan* 6:9; 5:13). He will be 'a man of humility (ταπεινώσεως)' (*T. Benj.* 10:7), 'a man working righteousness and working mercy (ποιῶν δικαιοσύνην καὶ ποιῶν ἔλεος) unto all who are far off and who are near' (*T. Napht.* 4:5).

Jesus Christ's behaviour, characterized by humility, meekness, mercy, and righteousness, turns out to be in complete accordance with the law of God. For it is an expression of the command to love one's neighbour. In the author's opinion, the contents of the law can be summarized in the two great commands to love or fear God and to love one's neighbour. Both commandments (cf. Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18) form the basis of the parænesis in *T. 12 Patr.*⁴⁰

In *T. 12 Patr.*, the law is understood above all as being a collection of ethical commands. Ritual, cultic, or ceremonial commandments do not play a role of

⁴⁰ See *T. Iss.* 5:2; 7:6; *T. Dan* 5:3; cf. *T. Reub.* 6:9; *T. Sim.* 4:7; *T. Levi* 13:1; *T. Zeb.* 8:5; 10:5; *T. Dan* 6:1; *T. Gad* 3:2; 4:2; 5:4-5; 6:1,3; 7:7; *T. Jos.* 11:1; 17:2; *T. Benj.* 3:1; 10:10. Cf. esp. H.W. Hollander, *Joseph*, 7-9, and M. de Jonge, *Parænese*, esp. pp. 538-44 (= 277-83).

any importance.⁴¹ Allusions to the non-ethical contents of the law of Moses or to its function and purpose in the history of the people of Israel are absent, which would be very strange if the intended readers of *T. 12 Patr.* were not only Christians but also Jews. If *T. 12 Patr.* were composed to convince the Jews of the Christian truth, indirect references or allusions to the Torah would certainly not have been lacking.

Instead, the commandments given by the patriarchs to their sons are the same as those given by Jesus according to the NT writings. Or, in other words, the law that is 'renewed' by Jesus and taught by him 'through his works' is nothing other than the moral teaching of the patriarchs, according to the author of *T. 12 Patr.* The patriarchs, living before Moses, and 'the Saviour of the world' teach the same law of God, namely, the essential and universal commands to love or fear God and to love one's neighbour!⁴²

All this is in agreement with second century Christian conceptions which are also found in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, as we have seen above. The difference is that in *T. 12 Patr.* it is not worked out, nor put into a theological system, as it is in Justin's *Dialogue*. The author, composer, or redactor of *T. 12 Patr.* was not a theologian *pur sang*, but he shared and transmitted common early Christian thoughts.

Thus, according to the author of *T. 12 Patr.*, the patriarchs, living in pre-Mosaic times, taught the eternal and universal commandments which can be summarized in the two great love commands. The Mosaic Law was a law given to the people of Israel and involved not only ethical commands but also many other commandments, including ritual, cultic, and ceremonial. In *T. 12 Patr.*, there is hardly any reference to the Law of Moses, which, since the coming of Jesus Christ, God's eschatological agent, represents a period of history that is passed. The 'renewal' of the law by Jesus consisted in a return to the essentials of the law, *viz.* the ethical part of the law of God centred on the commands to love God and to love one's neighbour.

The reaction of the Jewish leaders to this 'man who renews the law'⁴³ will be

⁴¹ Against H.D. Slingerland, 'The Nature of Nomos (Law) within the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs', *JBL* 105 (1986) 39-48. Cf. H.C. Kee, 'The Ethical Dimensions in the Testaments of the XII as a Clue to Provenance', *NTS* 24 (1978) 259-70; M. de Jonge, *Paränese, passim*; and the note on *T. Benj.* 3:3 in H.W. Hollander - M. de Jonge, *Commentary* (p. 418).

⁴² Though the combination of these two commandments may go back to Jewish Hellenism, the formulation, which avoids abstract terms like εὐσέβεια and φιλανθρωπία but uses verbal forms, is wholly in agreement with what we find in early Christianity (see, e.g., Mark 12:30-31).

⁴³ Cf. *Barn.* 2:6; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 11:2,4; 12:3; 34:1; 43:1.

that of rejection: they will call him 'a deceiver (πλάνων)' (*T. Levi* 16:3)⁴⁴ and they will kill him. This behaviour is mentioned by the author of *T. 12 Patr.* in order to point out the lawlessness of the Jews. Their opposition to God's eschatological agent shows their opposition to the very essentials of the law of God as taught by Israel's famous forefathers, the patriarchs, as well as by Jesus Christ. It functions as a warning example in a series of parenetic examples, meant to edify the Christian readers of *T. 12 Patr.*

5. Conclusions

T. 12 Patr., as they lie before us, have been composed by and for Christians. Parenesis is the focus of the writing, and the Christian author, composer, or redactor's purpose was to edify his Christian readers and to exhort them to practise a truly Christian life. In order to transmit his ethical message as effectively as possible, he adopted the popular literary genre of the farewell discourse. The choice of this genre was based upon the fact that the emphasis of such 'testaments' delivered by virtuous men of old, always lies upon parenesis. Furthermore, the twelve sons of Jacob were regarded as pious and respectable men, real 'patriarchs', whereas on the other hand the tensions within the family of Jacob as told in Gen 37-50 and retold and expanded in Judaism and early Christianity, gave sufficient material for reflexion. Thus, the lives of the patriarchs as described in the biographical sections of *T. 12 Patr.* could serve very well as illustrations of the parenesis.

The predictions of the future seem to play a similar role. In these predictions, the author refers to the eventful history of the people of Israel and uses the Sin-Exile-Return pattern to make it understandable. The Jews' negative attitude towards 'the Saviour of the world' provides yet another example of wrong behaviour and disobedience to God and his law, a law centred on the two commands to love or fear God and to love one's neighbour.

The rejection of Jesus Christ by the Jews is sharply criticised by the author, composer, or redactor of *T. 12 Patr.*, not in order to persuade the Jews to repent and to convince them of the Christian truth, but to give his Christian readers another example of objectionable moral behaviour.

⁴⁴ See also Matt 27:63; John 7:12; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 69:7; 108:2; *Acts of Thomas* 48. Cf. G.N. Stanton, *Gospel*, 237-46.