

The Ravenous Wolf: The Apostle Paul and Genesis 49.27 in the Early Church

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Jacob's blessing of his youngest son Benjamin (Gen 49.27) was widely understood in the early Church as a prophecy of that most (in)famous Benjaminite, the apostle Paul. This exegesis enjoyed enduring popularity and can be traced to every corner of the Roman world. It is also early: it was already well established by the time of its earliest surviving witnesses at the end of the second century. But if it predates the late second century, when did it originate? While we can only speculate, this paper offers reasons for supposing that this exegesis may reach back into the first century.

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The patriarch Jacob's deathbed blessings addressed to his twelve sons (Gen 49.1–27) were regularly understood as prophecies of future events in early Christianity.¹ His words to his youngest son, Benjamin, were most often taken as a prediction of Saul of Tarsus' conversion and call,² and his teaching ministry as the apostle Paul. In what follows we will examine several forms this exegesis could take, but will focus on the form it most often took and a significant variation thereof. While we will concentrate on the earliest evidence for this exegesis, i.e. the evidence of the second and third centuries, brief attention will also be given to the later evidence of the fourth and fifth centuries. Finally, some guesses, necessarily speculative, will be made about the origin of this exegetical tradition. It will be helpful to begin by setting before us the text of Gen 49.27 LXX, upon which most early Christian writers directly or indirectly depended:

1 Cf. e.g. the clear statements of Hippolytus, *The Blessing of Jacob* 12; Origen, *Hom. Ezek.* 4.4.1; *Princ.* 3.5.1; Ephraem, *Comm. Gen.* 42.1; and Ambrose, *De Patr.* 2.6.

2 While modern scholarship debates whether Saul/Paul's experience was a call or a conversion, or some combination of the two, the early Christian writers discussed in this essay did not feel the need to decide between the two.

Βενιαμὴν λύκος ἄρπαξ· τὸ πρωινὸν ἔδεται ἔτι καὶ εἰς τὸ ἑσπέρας διαδώσει ³ τροφήν.	Benjamin (is) a ravenous wolf; in the early morning he will still be eating and in the evening he shall distribute food. ⁴
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1. Early Third-Century Witnesses to the Majority Form

One of the earliest examples of the ‘Pauline interpretation’ of Gen 49.27, Tertullian’s *Adv. Marc.* 5.1.5, will serve as a convenient introduction to the exegesis. The North African Father writes:

Even Genesis long ago promised Paul to me. Among those figures and prophetic blessings over his sons, when Jacob had got to Benjamin he said, ‘Benjamin is a ravening wolf: until morning he will still devour, and in the evening will distribute food.’ He foresaw that Paul would arise of the tribe of Benjamin, a ravening wolf devouring until the morning, that is, one who in his early life would harass the Lord’s flock as a persecutor of the churches, and then at evening would distribute food, that is, in declining age would feed Christ’s sheep as the doctor of the gentiles.⁵

Paul himself relates his descent from the tribe of Benjamin.⁶ This fact alone would have brought the apostle of the Gentiles to the mind of many early Christian exegetes when reading Gen 49.27. (Indeed, it was common in the early Church to relate any reference to Benjamin in the Old Testament to the apostle.)⁷ That Paul had been a persecutor of Christians before his dramatic ‘conversion’ was one of the best-known facts about him in the early Church.⁸ Paul’s teaching min-

3 The Vaticanus (B), supported by a single minuscule (56*; AD 1096) reads δίδωσι. Other later manuscripts differ in the tense of either διαδίδωμι or δίδωμι (with some reading the present and others the future).

4 There are two differences between the LXX and the MT. First, the former understands the τῷ of the second line as the preposition ‘as far as, still, while’, whereas it almost certainly was intended as the noun ‘prey, booty’. Second, in the third line, the MT speaks of ‘dividing spoil’ rather than ‘distributing food.’

5 Translation from E. Evans, tr. and ed., *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem* (2 vols.; OECT; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) II.510–11.

6 Phil 3.5; Rom 11.1.

7 Cf. e.g. the similar ‘Pauline’ interpretation of the Benjaminite Saul, first King of Israel, immediately following the above passage from Tertullian, *Adv. Haer.* 5.1.5; Hilary of Poitiers’ comments on ‘there is Benjamin’ (Ps 68.27 (67.28 LXX)) in his *Tractatus Pss. I–XCI* 67.28; Ambrose’ regular interpretation of Benjamin as a type of Paul in his *De Ioseph* (e.g. 8.44–5; 9.46–7; 10.52; 11.61–2 etc.); Jerome’s recall of Paul when visiting Gibeah, the site of the events recorded in Judg 19–20 in his *Ep.* 108 and especially the similar ‘Pauline’ application of Deut 33.12 in Hippolytus, *Bened. Moses* 14; Ambrose, *De Patr.* 12.57–59; and Epiphanius, *Gem.* 12.

8 E.g. Gal 1.13; 1 Cor 15.9; Phil 3.6; Acts 9.1–5; 1 Tim 1.13; *Ep. Apost.* 31, 33; *Acts Peter* 2; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.12.5.

istry,⁹ especially as ‘the apostle to the Gentiles’, was also common knowledge.¹⁰ These three strands come together in Tertullian’s exegesis of the blessing over Benjamin: Paul was a Benjaminite, who before his conversion (i.e. in the morning) ravaged the church as a wolf, but afterwards (in the evening) he imparted spiritual nourishment through his teaching ministry.¹¹ This same interpretation, with all *three essential elements*, in the pre-Nicene period, is found once more in Tertullian (*Scorp.* 13.1–2), but also in Hippolytus (*Bened. Jacob* 28; cf. also *Cat. fr. Gen.* 51–2; and *Bened. Mos.* 3¹²) and Origen (*Hom. Ezek.* 4.4.2; cf. also *Sel. Gen.* on 43.34). A quick perusal of each will show their fundamental similarity to Tertullian’s exegesis cited above from *Adversus Marcionem*:

But how Paul, an apostle, from being a persecutor, who first of all shed the blood of the church, though afterwards he exchanged the sword for the pen, and turned the dagger into a plough, being first a ravening wolf of Benjamin, then himself supplying food as did Jacob ... (Tertullian, *Scorp.* 13.1–2)¹³

‘Benjamin, a ravenous wolf, still eating in the early morning and in the evening he gives nourishment’ [Gen 49.27]. Therefore, as ‘ravenous wolf’ he most clearly names Paul, the apostle, who was born from the tribe of Benjamin – (who had been) a ravenous wolf at the beginning – tearing in pieces and consuming the sheep of the church. As Paul himself also confesses, ‘I am not worthy that I should be called apostle, because I persecuted beyond measure the church of God; but by the grace of God, I am what I am’ [1 Cor. 15.9–10; cf. Gal. 1.13]. Because of this Rachel also, while giving birth to Benjamin, called his name ‘son of my distress’ [Gen 35.18], prophesying what would be. Because Paul, born from this tribe, brought distress and tribulation to his own mother, that is, the church, destroying all those who call on the Name of the Lord. At the beginning he was a blasphemer and persecutor; later having repented he imparted to all spiritual and heavenly food, he being the first to proclaim among the Gentiles the good news concerning Christ, in whom we, having believed, also give praise to God. His is the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hippolytus, *Bened. Jacob* 28)¹⁴

‘Benjamin is a ravenous wolf. He devours in the morning and will give food in the evening’ [Gen 49.27]. That Benjamin was never a ravenous wolf, that Benjamin never gave food in the evening. But he who was born ‘from the

9 Acts 17.22–34; Polycarp, *Phil.* 3.2.

10 E.g. Rom 15.16–19; Gal 1.15–16; Col 1.24–7; Acts 9.15; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 4.24.1.

11 1 Cor 3.1–2; cf. Heb 5.12–14.

12 This passage is also preserved in catena manuscripts, where it is incorrectly attributed to Irenaeus. See W. W. Harvey, ed., *Sancti Irenaei: libros quinque Adversus Haereses* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Typis Academicis, 1857) II.487.

13 The translation is S. Thelwall’s in *ANF*, III.646.

14 The translation is my own from the text of M. Brière, L. Mariès and B.-Ch. Mercier, eds., *Hippolyte de Rome: Sur les bénédictions d’Isaac, de Jacob et de Moïse* (PO 27.1–2; Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1954) 114.

tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, according to the Law a Pharisee, circumcised on the eighth day' [Phil. 3.5], he was predicted to be a Benjamin, a ravenous wolf, devouring in the morning (when he was a young man), and giving food in the evening (when as a believer he offered spiritual food from himself to the churches he had established). (Origen, *Hom. Ezek. 4.4.2*)¹⁵

In each of these the same three elements come together: Paul, from the tribe of Benjamin, prior to his conversion will ravage the church like a wolf as a persecutor, but after his conversion will impart spiritual nourishment through his teaching. Tertullian completed the fifth book of his polemical work against Marcion in AD 212 and his *Scorpiace* the following year.¹⁶ Origen's *Homilies on Ezekiel* probably date from around 240.¹⁷ Dating Hippolytus' contribution is much more difficult. This is primarily due to our confusion as to who Hippolytus was, as well as when and where he lived. There are, according to current scholarship, three main options.¹⁸ The traditional view, which still has defenders, would place him in Rome in the closing decades of the second century and the first third of the next.¹⁹ The view associated with Pierre Nautin and championed, with some modifications, in Italian scholarship, holds that the corpus of works attributed to Hippolytus are to be divided between a Hippolytus of Rome and an eastern exegete of the second or third century.²⁰ Finally, it has been argued that the theological and exegetical differences, as well as the noted similarities, found in the various works attributed to Hippolytus can best be accounted for if they arose from different authors belonging to the same Roman school of the late second and early third century.²¹ I prefer the last option, which would place the *Blessings of Jacob* in Rome, near the beginning of the third century. However

15 The translation is taken from T. P. Scheck, tr., *Origen: Homilies 1–14 on Ezekiel* (ACW 62; New York: Newman, 2010) 71–2.

16 So J. Quasten, *Patrology* (3 vols.; Utrecht: Spectrum, 1953) II.275, 282.

17 Scheck, *Homilies*, 2–3.

18 Valuable summaries of current scholarship can be found in C. Moreschini and E. Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History* (2 vols.; tr. M. J. O'Connell; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005) 1.232–47 and R. E. Heine, 'Hippolytus, Ps.-Hippolytus and the early Canons', *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (ed. F. Young, L. Ayres and A. Louth; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 142–51.

19 So Quasten, *Patrology*, II.163–207 and M. Richard, 'Hippolyte de Rome (saint)', *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* VII.1 (1969) 531–71.

20 E.g. P. Nautin, *Hippolyte et Josipe: contributions à l'histoire de la littérature chrétienne du troisième siècle* (ETHDT 1; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1947); id., 'Hippolytus', *EECh* (2 vols.; ed. A. Di Berardino, tr. A. Walford; Cambridge: Clarke, 1992) 1.383–5; V. Loi et al., eds., *Ricerche su Ippolito* (SEA 13; Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1977); M. Simonetti et al., eds., *Nuove ricerche su Ippolito* (SEA 30; Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1989); J. A. Cerrato, *Hippolytus between East and West: The Commentaries and the Provenance of the Corpus* (OTM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

21 So, above all, A. Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century* (VCSup 31; Leiden: Brill, 1995).

that is decided, the exegetical connections which the *Blessings of Jacob* share with two others works of the Hippolytan corpus, *On the Antichrist* and the *Commentary on Daniel*, both of which probably belong to the first decade of the third century,²² favour a similar dating for it. Thus, the chronological order of our three earliest witnesses could be something like: Hippolytus in ca. 205, Tertullian in 212 and 213, Origen in 240.

The geographical spread of these witnesses calls for comment. Hippolytus belongs either to Rome or the East (perhaps Asia Minor), Tertullian to North Africa and Origen to Palestine. Whether, with regard to Hippolytus, we opt for Rome or Asia Minor, we are have here a large triangle, which takes in a good deal of the Roman world. However, this impressive geographical diversity may need to be qualified, for we know that in ca. 215 Origen made a journey to Rome, in which he attended a lecture given by an Hippolytus.²³ Similarly, it was once held that Tertullian spent time in Rome,²⁴ but that supposition is based on the now widely questioned identification of the Father with a famous Roman jurist of the same name.²⁵ Nonetheless, Origen's journey and encounter with a Roman Hippolytus is probable if not absolutely certain.²⁶ The doubt over this Hippolytus' identity, however, means that we should be cautious before concluding that Origen learned this bit of exegesis on his Roman journey. That would clearly be impossible if Nautin, Simonetti, Cerrato and others are correct, for our exegetical tradition would then belong to an unknown eastern exegete and not to a Roman presbyter. However that may be, Origen's sojourn in Rome was not a long one (Eusebius, *HE* 6.14.11) and, it is clear, the issue of Monarchianism dominated his theological discussions with whomever he met there.²⁷ Thus, while it is possible that Origen derived this exegetical gem from the Hippolytus he met in Rome, this must remain uncertain. Our exegetical tradition, then, was either already widespread by the beginning of the third century or was becoming widespread at that time. On the basis of the evidence from Hippolytus, Tertullian and Origen alone we cannot decide which is more correct, but evidence that we will consider in a moment suggests that the former option is to be preferred. First, we must briefly consider how the exegetical tradition spread in succeeding centuries.

22 So Quasten, *Patrology*, II.170–1 and Moreschini and Norelli, *Early Christian Literature*, I.241–2.

23 Jerome, *De vir. ill.* 61; cf. Eusebius, *HE* 6.14.10.

24 E.g. Quasten, *Patrology*, II.246.

25 Cf. Moreschini and Norelli, *Early Christian Literature*, I.333 and R. E. Heine, 'The Beginnings of Latin Christian Literature', *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, 133.

26 Jerome's accuracy is accepted by R. E. Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 98–9 and J. W. Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (London: SCM, 1983) 76, but questioned by H. Crouzel, *Origen: The Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian* (tr. A. S. Worrall; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989) 14.

27 See Heine, *Origen*, 98–100 and Trigg, *Origen*, 76–80.

2. Later Witnesses to the Majority Form

In the post-Nicene period, witnesses to our tradition proliferate. In the fourth and fifth centuries the tradition occurs in Gaul (Hilary),²⁸ Northern Italy (Ambrose),²⁹ Southern Italy (Rufinus),³⁰ Asia Minor (Asterius of Amasea),³¹ Cyprus (Epiphanius),³² Palestine (Jerome),³³ Alexandria (Didymus the Blind³⁴ and Cyril³⁵), North Africa (Augustine)³⁶ and Spain (Prudentius).³⁷ In addition, while it was rejected by members of the Antiochene school, who were suspicious of allegory, it was nonetheless known to Diodore of Tarsus,³⁸ Theodoret of Cyrus³⁹ and Gennadius of Constantinople.⁴⁰ Diodore explicitly rejects the interpretation:

Some say that this refers to Paul the apostle who was from the tribe of Benjamin, not understanding that Jacob, when he speaks, prophesies to the tribes. Although he expressly recalled the Lord by the prediction addressed to Judah, primarily he says something concerning the tribe. Those who suppose that this was said concerning Paul, conclude this since, they say, he first persecuted and then was persecuted; for it says, 'in the morning he shall still be eating, but in the evening he shall distribute food', the final phrase either referring to his being persecuted or feeding those to whom he preached. But some suppose the 'in the morning he shall still be eating' refers to his being taught by the lawyer Gamaliel, and having been well trained in the Law in his youth, he shall in time become a teacher of many nations. Therefore, it says, 'He will distribute.' But the true story of the prophecy runs thus: 'A certain man from the tribe of Ephraim took a concubine from the tribe of Judah' [Judg 19.1]. (Cat. fr. Gen. 49.27)⁴¹

Theodoret and Gennadius are similar, if not so strident: they both held that Gen 49.27 foretold the events related in Judges 19–20, but also mention our tradition as

28 *Tractatus Pss. I-XCI* 67.28.

29 *De Patr.* 12.57–59; *Exp. Ps.* 118 6.17.

30 *Bened. Patr.* 2.28–9.

31 *Hom.* 8.

32 *De Gem.* 12.

33 *Quest. Hebr. Gen.* on Gen 49.27; *Comm. Isa.* 4.15 (on 11.6–9); 18.17 (on 65.22–5); cf. also *Ep.* 38.1; 60.8; 69.6; *Comm. Hos.* 2.5.8–9; *Comm. Isa.* 14.26 (on 53.12b).

34 *Comm. Eccl.* 11.

35 *Glaph. Gen.* 7.

36 *Hom.* 278 and 333; *En. Pss.* 58.14; 78.2.

37 *Dittochaeon* 48. This example is especially interesting, because in the *Dittochaeon* Prudentius offers verses to accompany various mosaics and/or frescoes. Prudentius, then, may have known a mosaic or fresco in which a wolf was used as a symbol for the apostle of the Gentiles.

38 Cat. fr. Gen. 49.27.

39 *Quest. Octateuch* 112.7.

40 Cat. fr. Gen. 49.27.

41 The translation is my own of the text printed in F. Petit, *Catena Graeca in Genesim et in Exodum*, vol. II: *Collectio coisliniana in Genesim* (Leuven, 1986) no. 308, pp. 287–8.

a view held by others.⁴² One wonders, therefore, what to make of the silence concerning our tradition in John Chrysostom, another member of the Antiochene school. He refers to Gen 49.27 once in his preserved works, *Homilies on Genesis* 67.14. There John merely opines that Jacob prophesies an event of his near future, but fails to tell us what that event was. Given the unanimity which exists among the other members of the school, it is tempting to conclude that John also believed that Gen 49.27 referred to the history recorded in Judges 19–20 and that, although he may have known of it, chose to pass over our tradition in silence.

The above list, although it includes all the examples known to me to the close of the fifth century, may well prove to be incomplete.⁴³ The exegetical tradition was cited in every part of the Roman world and was attested from the beginning of the third century to the end of the fifth – and beyond. All in all, Jacob's words to his youngest son would seem to have served as the most important Old Testament prophetic text for the ministry of Paul in the early church. One wonders, therefore, why studies in the reception history of Paul in early Christianity fail to take note of this significant text.⁴⁴

3. Variants of the Majority Form

A number of minor variants to our exegetical tradition could be mentioned. For example, Diodore's knowledge of an interpretation that connected the

42 Interestingly, Origen may also on one occasion have applied Gen 49.27 to Judg 19–20. A catena fragment (PG 17.37) on Judg 20.21 attributed to Origen explains the change in fortunes of the Benjaminites recorded in Judg 20.19–48 by the morning/evening dichotomy of Gen 49.27. Unfortunately, as with many of the catena fragments attributed to him, we cannot be certain that this is authentically Origen.

43 In the sixth century it is found in Caesarius of Arles (*Hom.* 226.3), who has borrowed it from Augustine's *Hom.* 333, and Arator, *Hist. Apost.* 1 (on Acts 9.15).

44 E.g. A. Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum* (BHT 58; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979) 393; R. D. Sider, 'Literary Artifice and the Figure of Paul in the Writings of Tertullian', *Paul and the Legacies of Paul* (ed. W. S. Babcock; Dallas: SMU, 1990) 102; and A. M. Bain, 'Tertullian: Paul as Teacher of the Gentile Churches', *Paul and the Second Century* (ed. M. F. Bird and J. R. Dodson; LNTS 412; London: T&T Clark, 2011) 209, all make brief references to Tertullian's use of Gen 49.27 LXX in *Adv. Marc.* 5.1.5, but only Sider also mentions *Scrop.* 13, and none of them note the parallels in Hippolytus or Origen – or the continuing tradition. In other words, none of them are aware that Tertullian was drawing on an existing exegetical tradition. G. Lüdemann, *Opposition to Paul in Jewish Christianity* (tr. M. E. Boring; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) makes no reference to Gen 49.27. A partial exception is Martin Meiser's recent article, 'Überwindung, Bekehrung oder Berufung - Apg 9; 22; 26 in altkirchlicher Wahrnehmung', *Ancient Perspectives on Paul* (ed. T. Nicklas, A. Merkt and J. Verheyden; NTOA 102; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013) 30–58, who cites in a footnote, in addition to the two Tertullian passages, Augustine (*En. Pss.* 58, *Hom.* 333), Asterius (*Hom.* 8), Prudentius (*Dit.* 48), Jerome (*Comm. Isa.* 18.17) and, incorrectly, Arnobius (*Comm. Pss.* 67).

Benjaminite wolf's consumption of food in the morning with Paul's youthful studies under Gamaliel may have also been known to Didymus the Blind.⁴⁵ Jerome twice interprets the Isaian prophecy about the lamb and wolf dwelling/feeding together (11.6; 65.25) as a reference to Ananias' baptism of Paul or to Paul and Peter's joint labours (*Comm. Isa.* 4.15; 18.17). Another variant, however, requires extended attention, for it is clearly early and attested in three diverse witnesses. It will be helpful to set out these passages in full:

(1) And I [= Benjamin] will no longer be called a ravenous wolf because of your [= Benjamin's sons'] ravages, but rather the Lord's worker distributing food to those who do what is good. (2) And there shall arise from my seed in the latter times a man who is beloved of the Lord [cf. Deut 33.12], who shall hear his voice on earth and shall perform the pleasure of his will, enlightening all the Gentiles with new knowledge. He will be a light of knowledge trampling on Israel with salvation and as a wolf snatching individuals from them and transferring [lit. 'giving'] them to the synagogues of the Gentiles. (3) Until the end of the ages he will be in the synagogues of the Gentiles and among their rulers as a musical melody in everyone's mouth. (4) Both his deeds and words will be recorded in the holy books; he will be an elect of God forever. (5) And because of him, Jacob my father instructed me, saying, 'He will complete what is lacking in your tribe'. (*T. Benj.* 11.1-5)⁴⁶

'Benjamin is a ravenous wolf' refers to Paul, who was a wolf to the wolves and snatched all souls away from the evil one, and 'in the evening he will divide

45 Didymus' *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* exists only in a single papyrus manuscript found at Tura. The passage in question is fragmentary, but Didymus connects τὸ πρῶτ' ἤσθηεν ('he ate in the morning') with ἐπαιδεύετο ἐν τῇ εἰσαγωγῇ τῇ κατὰ τὴν πίστιν ... ('he was taught (or trained) in the introduction (?), which is according to faith ...'). So Didymus *could* be referring to Paul's reception of the faith from the other apostles (cf. *Ep. Apost.* 31-3), but also possibly to his training under Gamaliel. For the Greek text, see G. Binder and L. Liesenborghs, eds. and trs., *Didymos der Blinde: Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes (Tura-Papyrus), Teil IV* (Bonn: Habelt, 1969) 60-1.

46 My translation of the text in M. de Jonge *et al.*, eds., *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Critical Edition of the Greek Text* (PVTG; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 178-9. One manuscript, Charles' *c*, and the Armenian and New Greek versions omit any reference to Paul. MS *c* makes this into a prophecy of the Messiah who 'shall arise ... from the seed Judah and Levi', but even that is omitted by the Armenian. Although R. H. Charles (*The Greek Versions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908) 230-1) preferred the text of *c*, this reading is manifestly a correction by a later scribe who either was unaware of 'Pauline' exegesis of Gen 49.27 or wanted to bring this text into line with other references to the Messiah elsewhere in the *Testaments*. M. de Jonge (*The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Study of their Text and Composition and Origin* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975²) 34) earlier posited that only 11.1-2a came near the original and that 11.2b-5 is a later interpolation. He subsequently changed his mind, arguing that both *c* and the related New Greek version went 'back to a text which was broken off by accident' (M. de Jonge, 'The Greek Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Armenian Version', *Studies on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Text and Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 1975) 135 n. 56).

what he seizes', that is, at the end of the world he will rest with a reward greater than his labors. (Ephraem, *Comm. Gen.* 43.11)⁴⁷

... and to Paul being from the Benjamite tribe, first thoroughly plundering the Church, but afterwards in truth making war against demons and distributing their goods – that is, leading out people from the sovereignty of demons and distributing them to the rulers of the church. (Apollinaris of Laodicea, *Cat. fr. Gen.* 49.27)⁴⁸

These three witnesses to the 'Pauline' exegesis of Gen 49.27 are more diverse than the others we have examined and differ from one another considerably. One difference, for example, arises from a different text. As noted above, most our witnesses were working, directly or indirectly, with the LXX.⁴⁹ An exception to this, however, is Ephraem, whose Old Testament was the Syriac Peshitta. Consequently, he does not know the Greek reading 'he shall distribute food' and so cannot relate this part of the verse to Paul's teaching ministry. For all their differences, what unites these three exegetes and justifies their being considered as a single variant is that Paul's activity as a wolf is applied to his career as a Christian missionary, snatching or leading individuals away from Satan or Judaism to the church. Consequently, in these three witnesses we do not find the same emphasis on Paul's conversion, or so strong a distinction between his two careers – with the partial exception of Apollinaris.⁵⁰ No mention is made of the morning and evening of Gen 49.27 – other than Ephraem's interpretation of 'evening' as 'the end of the world' and *T. Benj.* 11.3's reference to 'the end of the ages' (see below).

It is worth noting that these three witnesses very probably derive from the same general location: Syria. There is no doubt with regard to the latter two. Ephraem lived first in Nisibis and then Edessa, both in eastern Syria, while Apollinaris taught in Antioch before becoming bishop of his home town, Laodicea, both in western Syria. The geographical origins of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* are more uncertain, but recently a strong case has been made for somewhere in Syria. Joel Marcus has demonstrated a close association between the *Testaments* and another work of likely Syrian provenance: the

47 Translation from E. G. Matthews, Jr and J. P. Amar, trs., K. McVey, ed., *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Selected Prose Works* (FOTC 91; Washington: Catholic University of America, 1994) 211.

48 The translation is my own of the text in R. Devreesse, *Les anciens commentateurs grecs de l'Octateuque et des Rois* (ST 201; Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1959) 132.

49 This is true even of *T. Benj.* Note the διαδίδων τροφήν of 11.1.

50 Apollinaris seems to know the conversion motif, but only in a muted form: 'Paul ... first thoroughly plundering the Church, but afterwards in truth making war against demons and distributing their goods'. Indeed, Apollinaris' concise statement reads like a combination of this variant with the majority form, which would not be surprising coming from a Gentile Christian who was in conversation with Jewish Christians (see below).

Didascalía Apostolorum.⁵¹ Marcus argues that the two works represent two sides of a fierce argument between two different Christian communities over the keeping of Jewish *halakhah* by Christians; the *Testaments* reflect the position of Torah-observant Jewish Christians, while the *Didascalía* opposes such practices. If Marcus is correct, and in my opinion he has made a compelling case, then the likelihood that the *Testaments* derive from a geographical location near to that of the *Didascalía* is a logical conclusion.

More significant is the fact that all three witnesses exhibit a profound knowledge of Jewish extra-biblical traditions and of Jewish *halakhah*. In the case of Apollinaris and the *Testaments* it is probably a question of Jewish Christianity; Apollinaris almost certainly enjoyed close contact with Jewish Christians,⁵² and Marcus' case for the *Testaments* as a product of Jewish Christianity is strong and, I think, convincing. With Ephraem, it is often argued that his knowledge of Jewish traditions *probably* derived from the Jewish environment within which early Syriac Christianity developed rather than from direct contact with Jewish Christianity.⁵³ However, Sten Hidal has recently made a good case for a Jewish Christian presence in Syria.⁵⁴ What is clear is that both Epiphanius and Jerome located a Jewish Christian sect, which they termed 'Nazarenes', in Beroea, situated between Antioch and Laodicea, in the West, and Nisibis and Edessa, in the East.⁵⁵ Although both these patristic witnesses should be treated with caution, in this case there is good reason to credit their testimony: they are both recording a contemporary community, both knew Syria first-hand, and Jerome, in particular, spent some time studying the ascetic life very near Beroea.⁵⁶ This is important for our purposes because we know the Nazarenes held a positive view of the Apostle Paul. Jerome has preserved, in his commentary on Isaiah, five excerpts from a Nazarene commentary on the same prophet. Among those selections is the following:

51 J. Marcus, 'The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* and the *Didascalía Apostolorum*: A Common Jewish Christian Milieu?', *JTS* 61 (2010) 596–626, esp. 597–8.

52 See esp. A. Schmidtke, *Neue Fragmente und Untersuchungen zu den Judenchristlichen Evangelien: Ein Beitrag zur Literatur und Geschichte der Judenchristen* (TU 37.1; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1911) esp. 63–94. See also W. Kinzig, 'Jewish and "Judaizing" Eschatologies in Jerome', *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire* (ed. R. Kalmin and S. Schwartz; ISACR 3; Leuven: Peeters, 2003) 409–29.

53 See R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study of Early Syriac Tradition* (rev. edn; London: T&T Clark, 2004) 6–11 and S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (rev. edn; CS 124; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992) 20.

54 S. Hidal, 'Evidence for Jewish Believers in the Syriac Fathers', *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (ed. O. Skarsaune and R. Hvalvik; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007) 568–80.

55 Epiphanius, *Pan.* 29.7.7; Jerome, *De vir ill.* 3.

56 See R. A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity from the End of the New Testament Period until its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2010) 48–51, 121.

The Nazarenes, whose opinion I have set forth above, try to explain this passage in the following way: When Christ came and his preaching shone out, the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali [Isa 9.1] first of all were freed from the errors of the Scribes and Pharisees and he [i.e. Christ] shook off their shoulders the very heavy yoke of the Jewish traditions [Isa 9.4]. Later, however, the preaching became more dominant, that means the preaching was multiplied [Isa 9.1 (and 3?)] through the Gospel of the apostle Paul who was the last of all the apostles [cf. 1 Cor 15.8–9]. And the Gospel of Christ shone to the most distant tribes and the way of the whole sea [Isa 9.1]. Finally the whole world, which earlier walked or sat in darkness and was imprisoned in the bonds of idolatry and death, has seen the clear light of the Gospel [Isa 9.2]. (Jerome, *Comm. Isa.* 3.30 (on Isa 9.1–4))⁵⁷

In keeping with the usual pattern of the excerpts from this work, the phrase ‘the Scribes and Pharisees’ must be a reference to the leaders of the rabbinic movement with whom the Nazarenes indulged in an ongoing polemic.⁵⁸

All this suggests that a form of Jewish Christianity, probably to be identified with Jerome’s and Epiphanius’ Nazarenes, held a high opinion of the apostle Paul and used their Scriptures, at least Genesis and Isaiah, in their defence of his career and ministry. To be sure, as is well known, other Jewish Christians, especially the so-called Ebionites, held the apostle of the Gentiles in contempt.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, it is clear that the Nazarenes differed from other Jewish Christians in this regard and it is not unlikely that the group behind the *Testaments*, as well as those known to Apollinaris and Ephraem, were more akin to Jerome’s and Epiphanius’ Nazarenes than to the Ebionites.

The exegetical tradition that found a prophecy of the ministry of Paul in Jacob’s blessing of Benjamin in Gen 49.27, then, existed in various forms. Most often, the exegesis consisted simply of three elements: Paul’s descent from the tribe of Benjamin, his persecution of the church prior to his conversion and his teaching ministry after. This basic form, however, was capable of a number of variations (e.g. Diodore and Jerome above). Another form, probably connected with the Nazarenes, has come down to us through a single direct witness, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and two indirect ones, Apollinaris and Ephraem. Perhaps, because two of our sources are indirect witnesses, it appears less homogeneous. Nonetheless, its central characteristic identifies Paul with the Benjaminite wolf *during* his ministry: as a wolf he plunders

⁵⁷ The translation is adapted from Pritz, *Nazarene*, 64.

⁵⁸ On this commentary, see Pritz, *Nazarene*, 57–70 and Skarsaune, ‘Fragments of Jewish Christian Literature Quoted in Some Greek and Latin Fathers’, *Jewish Believers*, 373–8.

⁵⁹ Note the Ebionite claim that Paul was an apostate: Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.26.2; Eusebius, *HE* 3.27.4; Jerome, *Comm. Matt.* 2 (on Matt. 12.2) and Theodoret of Cyrus, *Comp. Haer.* 2.1. Note also the more general statements of Origen, *Cels.* 5.65 and *Hom. Jer.* 19.12, and the colourful biographies of the apostle taken from Jewish Christian sources (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.16.8–9 (cf. also 30.25.1) and *Ps.-Clem. Rec.* 1.27–71).

people from the Evil One or Judaism and transfers them to the safety of the church.

To the question which of these two versions should be given priority, a compelling case can be made for the majority one. First, there is the general observation that the majority form is the more simple, less complex of the two. In the opinion of de Jonge, the version in Tertullian, Hippolytus and Origen is 'more natural' than that in the *Testament of Benjamin*.⁶⁰ The majority version, as attested in Tertullian, Hippolytus and Origen, reads into Gen 49.27's 'morning and evening' a simple before/after narrative, in which Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road serves as the unstated fulcrum. The majority form, then, has a clear and simple inner logic.

T. Benj. 11.1–5, on the other hand, is interesting precisely because of its complexity. 'Benjamin's' assertion that he 'will no longer be called a ravenous wolf because of your [= his sons'] ravages' (11.1) raises the question, to which 'ravages' perpetrated by the tribe of Benjamin does the author allude? The biblical narrative records the likely answer: the Benjamites' ravaging of the Levite's concubine and the subsequent war between Benjamin and the other eleven tribes (Judg 19–20), which as, we have already seen, was connected with Gen 49.27 by members of the Antiochene school.⁶¹ The author of the *Testaments* was either the first to connect Gen 49.27 with the apostle Paul or he faced the same choice that Diodore and his fellows had, in the fourth and fifth centuries, between two competing interpretations of Gen 49.27. Whereas Diodore rejected one in favour of the other, the author of the *Testaments* either created the 'Pauline' interpretation or combined the two interpretations. The latter must have been the case.

According to *T. Benj.* 11, Benjamin through his descendants had been 'called a ravenous wolf because of (their) ravages' in the events recorded in Judg 19–20, but now, in the last days (cf. 11.2–3), through the ministry and teaching of the apostle Paul he has become 'the Lord's worker distributing food' to the Gentiles (*T. Benj.* 11.1) and 'complet[ing] what is lacking' in Israel (11.5). He will, in the person of Paul, remain a wolf, but only one who 'snatches individuals from Israel and transfers them to the synagogues of the Gentiles' (11.2). It is noticeable that the author of the *Testaments* takes the εἰς τὸ ἔσπέρασ not as a reference to Paul's post-conversion ministry, but as an eschatological reference: Paul the apostle will arise 'in the latter times' (ἐν ὑστέροις καιροῖς) and will be remembered 'until the end of the ages' (ἕως συντελείας τῶν αἰώνων). By implication, then, the τὸ

60 De Jonge, *Testaments*, 122. It should probably be stated that the three quarters of a page which de Jonge gives to *T. Benj.* 11.1–2, and its parallels in Tertullian, Hippolytus and Origen, are the fullest discussion of this exegetical tradition known to me. Cf. also the same author's 'Hippolytus' "Benedictions of Isaac, Jacob and Moses" and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *BTFT* 46 (1985) 245–60, esp. 256.

61 And, perhaps, Origen. See n. 42 above.

πρωτόν refers not to Saul of Tarsus' career prior to his conversion, but to the tribe's ravages chronicled in Judg 19–20.⁶² The before/after of the majority version takes as its point of departure the biography of Saul/Paul, while the before/after of the *Testament of Benjamin* revolves around the history of the tribe. This forces the author into an anomaly: *Benjamin* is no longer a ravenous wolf; through his descendant, Paul, he is now 'the Lord's worker' (11.1), but Benjamin's descendant continues to act as a wolf – at least towards Israel (11.2). But if the metaphor of a wolf's ravages is explained by the history of Judg 19–20 and if Benjamin is *no longer* a ravenous wolf, what need is there for Paul, Benjamin's seed, to be identified as a wolf (11.2)? It would seem that Paul's identity as a wolf was already presupposed by the *Testament's* author. Paul's identity as the wolf from the tribe of Benjamin was too well established in the author's mind – through the majority version – even though it was not needed in his scheme which focused on the tribe's history, rather than on the person of Paul.

Nonetheless, while the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* presume the majority version of the Pauline exegesis of Gen 49.27, they may well predate our three earliest witnesses to it. Origen's apparent reference to *Test. Reuben 2–3* in his *Homilies on Joshua* (15.6) probably indicates that the *Testaments* were already circulating in a form approaching that known to us sometime before the 250's.⁶³ How much earlier it is impossible to say. Martinus de Jonge argues, on the basis of parallels with Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Tertullian, that the work probably belongs to the period *ca.* AD 190–225,⁶⁴ I would prefer *ca.* AD 150–225. However that may be, since the *Testaments* presuppose the majority version of our exegetical tradition, that exegesis cannot have originated later than the second half of the second century.⁶⁵

4. Our Earliest Witness (?)

There is one further uncertain piece of evidence that, if it is accepted, would indicate that our exegetical tradition must have been in existence prior to AD 150. The composition of the *Epistula Apostolorum* almost certainly is to

62 I owe this observation of Prof. John Barclay.

63 The *Homilies on Joshua* are usually dated to the last years of Origen's life. So B. J. Bruce, tr., *Origen: Homilies on Joshua* (ed. C. White; FOTC 105; Washington: Catholic University of America, 2002) 19.

64 De Jonge, *Testaments*, 121–5.

65 Needless to say, I agree with de Jonge and others who regard the *Testaments* as a unitary composition of Christian origin. Nonetheless, my argument would not be affected if it were shown that they are in fact a Jewish work interpolated by Christians, for *T. Benj.* 11.1–5 is clearly Christian. Whether we are concerned with interpolations added in *ca.* AD 150–225 or with the *Testaments* as whole composed in the same period is ultimately immaterial.

be located just before 150.⁶⁶ In this post-resurrection dialogue, the risen Christ informs the college of apostles of the coming and future ministry of the apostle Paul (*Ep. Apost.* 31–3). In a prolix passage, he foretells that they

will encounter a man whose name is Saul, the translation of which is Paul [*sic!*]. Being a Jew, he will be circumcised in accordance with the Law. He will hear my voice from heaven with terror and fear and trembling. He will be blinded and by your hands he will be sealed⁶⁷ with spittle ... and ... immediately his eyes will be opened and he will glorify God, my heavenly Father. He will be strong among the Gentiles and the people [i.e. of Israel], and will preach and teach ... And he will profess his faith before mortal kings ... Whereas he had persecuted and hated me, he will profess faith in me ... He will be among my elect a chosen vessel [cf. Acts 9.15] and a bulwark which will not fall [cf. Jer. 1.18; 15.20]. He will be the last of the last [cf. 1 Cor. 15.8], the herald of the Gentiles, (and) perfect in the will of my Father.

The apostles, then, ask when they will meet this man and are told how Paul will set out for

Damascus in Syria that he might *ravage* the church which you are to create.⁶⁸

Unfortunately, the original Greek of the *Epistula* is lost and we are dependent, in this passage, only on the Ethiopic version. We cannot be certain, therefore, just what term the original Greek used for Saul's persecuting activities. Nonetheless, it is striking that the Ethiopic asserts that Saul will 'ravage' the Church (*mašaṭa* = ἄρπάζω), rather than 'persecute' (*sadada* = διώκω) or 'destroy' or 'pillage' (*'amanzaza* = πορθέω) it. The Ethiopic verb *mašaṭa* is cognate with the adjective 'ravenous' found in both Ethiopic Gen 49.27 (*tak^wlā mašāṭi*, 'ravenous wolf') and Matt 7.15 (*tak^wlāt mašāṭt*, 'ravenous wolves'). Moreover, the Greek adjective ἄρπαξ is extremely rare in the Greek Bible and occurs only in Gen 49.27 and Matt 7.15 with the meaning of 'ravenous':⁶⁹ elsewhere (Luke 18.11; 1 Cor 5.10–11; 6.10; Titus 1.9) it is used as a substantive for 'robber' or 'swindler'.⁷⁰ All this suggests that the original Greek of *Epist. Apost.* 33 had a form of the Greek verb

66 See D. D. Hannah, 'The Four-Gospel "Canon" in the *Epistula Apostolorum*', *JTS* 59 (2008) 598–633, esp. 628–32.

67 I.e. in baptism.

68 The translation is my own.

69 Interestingly, on both occasions modifying 'wolves'.

70 Cf. also Ezek 22.27, where ὡς λύκοι ἄρπάζοντες ἀπάγματα ('as wolves ravaging prey') is rendered *kama tak^wlāt mašāṭt yemašṣetu* (lit. 'as ravenous wolves they will ravage'). The Ethiopic scriptural references are cited from J. O. Boyd, ed., *The Octateuch in Ethiopic*, Part I: *Genesis* (Leyden: Brill, 1909) 154; R. Zuurmond, ed., *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum*, Part III: *The Gospel of Matthew* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001) 82–3; and M. A. Knibb, ed., *The Ethiopic Text of the Book of Ezekiel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 114.

ἀρπάζω. That we have here an allusion to Gen 49.27 LXX naturally follows. If, on the other hand, an allusion to a New Testament passage were intended, one would expect a form of πορθέω (cf. Gal 1.13, 23; Acts 9.21) or διώκω (Gal 1.13, 23; 1 Cor 15.9; Phil 3.6; 1 Tim 1.13; Acts 22.4; 26.11). To be sure, none of the other constituent parts of the Pauline exegesis of Gen 49.27 are present in *Ep. Apost.* 31–3: while the author refers to Paul as a persecutor and as a teacher, he does not mention Paul's descent from the tribe of Benjamin, nor is the word 'wolf' present; moreover food or feeding as a metaphor for teaching is entirely absent. Nonetheless, the use of ἀρπάζω/ἄρπαξ especially in connection with Paul's activity as a persecutor of the church is so striking that it seems likely that the wording of Gen 49.27 LXX has influenced the *Epistula's* author in his 'prophecy' of the coming of Paul. If this is correct, then the Pauline exegesis of this verse must be earlier than the composition of the *Epistula* in the decade or so prior to 150.

5. The Apostle's Self-understanding

Whoever first made that move merely followed in the steps of the apostle himself. Paul had already trawled the Hebrew Scriptures for justification of his calling and ministry. In Gal 1.15–16, Paul describes his call/conversion in language that recalls both Jeremiah (Jer 1.5) and the Servant of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 49.1, 5; cf. also 44.2). Like the prophets of old, Paul was 'set apart from his mother's womb and called by (God's) grace' (Gal 1.15). And, like both Jeremiah (Jer 1.5) and the Servant of Yahweh (Isa 49.6), Paul's mission was focused not on Israel but the nations (Gal 1.16). Elsewhere Paul identifies 'the day of salvation' foretold concerning the Servant (Isa 49.8) with the time of his ministry (2 Cor 6.1–2).

Paul refers back to the autobiographical Gal 1.15–16 in the opening verse of his letter to the Romans, where he declares that he was 'set apart for the gospel of God'.⁷¹ Galatians, of course, was written in the heat of controversy with those who both appealed to the Scriptures and questioned Paul's authority. In such a context it was indeed useful for Paul to present himself as a second Jeremiah or to relate to himself the kind of language Isaiah used for the Servant of Yahweh. Romans, on the other hand, was written some years later and betrays little or no evidence for a polemical context. Nonetheless, it is clear from Rom 1.1 that Paul had by no means distanced himself from what he claimed in Gal 1.15–16. Further on, when Paul describes to the Romans his mission to the Gentiles and his ambition to preach the Gospel 'where Christ is not (already) named' (Rom 15.14–21), he quotes Isa 52.15:

71 So J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (AB 33; London: Yale University Press, 1993) 229. Cf. also C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975) 1.53.

Those who have never been told of him shall see,
and those who have not heard will understand. (Rom 15.21)

Paul apparently found himself and his ministry in this prophetic verse: he was (the?) one who would announce the Servant of Yahweh to the Gentiles and make them understand about him whom they had never heard of. Paul's prophetic call to be a second Jeremiah or like to the Servant of Yahweh would appear to have been central to his self-understanding. Indeed, as Johannes Munck, more than half a century ago, noted,

[w]hen Paul applies these biblical expressions to his own call, he must be thinking, not only that he thereby illustrates God's call to him personally, but that that call is the same as it was in the case of Jeremiah and Deutero-Isaiah, a renewal of God's will for the salvation of the Gentiles, giving him a place in the history of salvation in line with those Old Testament figures.⁷²

Munck cogently argues, on the basis of Romans 9–11, that Paul believed himself, 'as the apostle to the Gentiles', to have been a 'central figure in the story of salvation', whose eschatological role prepared the way for the conversion of Israel.⁷³

Paul, therefore, found Scriptural authorisation for this ministry to the Gentiles, with all its eschatological significance, in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Thus, as it were, Paul himself 'set the stage' for the unknown Christian who found a similar authorisation for Paul's ministry in Jacob's words to his youngest son. Of course, such a reading of Gen 49.27 requires a typological reading of the Old Testament. Here too, however, Paul led the way: the apostle of the Gentiles often made use of typology in his interpretation of the Scriptures, and often did so in unexpected ways. In the words of Richard B. Hays, 'Paul repeatedly interprets Scripture in ways that must have startled his first audience.'⁷⁴ One need only recall Paul's identification of the rock which Israel encountered in her wilderness wanderings with Christ himself (1 Cor 10.1–13), or his comparison of two sons (Isaac and Esau), two women (Sarah and Hagar) and two mountains (Sinai and Jerusalem) as indicative of the two covenants (Gal 4.21–31), or his interpretation of the veil which Moses used to cover his face after speaking with God (2 Cor 3.12–18) to realise that the creator of the Pauline exegesis of Gen 49.27 inhabited the same hermeneutical world as Paul himself. And in that world, the move from finding Christ in the blessing of Judah (Gen 49.8–12) to finding Paul in the blessing of Benjamin (Gen 49.27) was natural and straightforward. It could have taken place at anytime between the apostle's death and our earliest detection of it in *Ep. Apost.* 31–3.

72 J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (tr. F. Clarke; London: SCM, 1959) 26.

73 Munck, *Paul*, 36–5; quotation on p. 49.

74 R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 1.

6. A First-Century Origin?

Or might it be even earlier? If it was such an obvious move, might it not have been made within Paul's own lifetime, by one of his associates or even by Paul himself? The possibility that the apostle himself might be the creative mind behind this exegesis should, I think, at least be considered. As we have just seen, Paul clearly regarded his ministry as a fulfilment of prophecy and he often made use of a typological reading of the Scriptures such as is found in our exegetical tradition. Two of the three central elements of the tradition occur separately in Paul's epistles, while the third must have been known to him. As has already been noted, Paul twice mentions his membership in the tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3.5; Rom 11.1). His descent from this tribe was clearly a matter of some importance to him. The feeding of others as a metaphor for his teaching ministry occurs in 1 Cor 3.1–2. To be sure, there it appears in a more developed and complicated form than in our tradition, but anyone who distinguished between the milk of his foundational, initial teaching and the solid food that was reserved for his more mature students could have easily referred to the whole of his teaching ministry as providing nourishment in general.

While nowhere in Paul's extant writings do we encounter the figure of a wolf as a persecutor or other enemy, the metaphor was so common that it cannot have been unfamiliar to him. It occurs in Luke's account of his ministry (Acts 20.29), and it found a place in the sayings of Jesus (Matt 7.15; Matt 10.16 par. Luke 10.3; cf. also John 10.12).⁷⁵ What is more, there are very strong reasons to suppose that Paul knew the dominical saying recorded in Luke 10.3 (par. Matt. 10.16): 'I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.' His discussion of the responsibility a congregation had to support its pastors in 1 Corinthians 9 is linked 'by a whole series of shared terms' with the block of dominical teaching found in Luke 10.⁷⁶ It follows that Paul must have known this dominical saying, for he knew the block of material in which it was embedded. The three elements of the traditional exegesis of Gen 49.27, then, were either used by Paul himself or were known to him. It would have taken, to be sure, a creative mind, who was also well versed in the Old Testament, not adverse to typological exegesis and who held a high opinion the apostle of the Gentiles to have wielded these three

⁷⁵ Cf. also *Did.* 16.3; Ignatius, *Phild.* 2.2; 2 *Clem.* 5.2–4; *Ep. Apost.* 44; Justin, 1 *Apol.* 16.13; 58.2; *Dial.* 35.3; *Acts Thom.* 25; 67; 79; *Acts Pet.* 8; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.Prol.2; and Rhodon *apud* Eusebius, *HE* 5.13.4.

⁷⁶ Quoting J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 92. Murphy-O'Connor here follows B. Fjörstedt, *Synoptic Tradition in 1 Corinthians: Themes and Clusters of Theme Words in 1 Corinthians 1–4 and 9* (Uppsala: Theologiska Institutionen, 1974) 65–77. Fjörstedt is also discussed (critically) by D. C. Allison, 'The Pauline Epistles and the Synoptic Gospels: The Pattern of the Parallels', *NTS* 28 (1982) 1–32. Allison questions some of the other examples of Synoptic Tradition in Paul, but grants that Fjörstedt has made a convincing case for 1 Corinthians 9.

elements into a coherent interpretation of Jacob's words. But surely it would be difficult to identify a figure in the first two centuries who fills this description as fully as does Saul/Paul of Tarsus! As noted above, given that Paul appealed to the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah to validate his apostleship to the Gentiles, it would not have been at all improbable for him to seek further validation in a typological – and playful? – reading of Gen 49.27.

Of course, it could well be asked whether Timothy or Titus, Epaphras or Epaphroditus, Onesimus or Tychicus, or another companion of Paul, in the decade or so after the apostle's death, who knew his letters and his teaching, could not have combined the three essential elements to create the 'Pauline exegesis' of Gen 49.27.⁷⁷ Or even whether the unknown admirer of Paul who first brought these three strands together belonged to the generation after that of Paul and his companions. Given the gaps in our knowledge of early Christianity in general and of Pauline circles in particular during the period between *ca.* 64 and 150, it would be unwise to choose between any of these options. In other words, it must be admitted that while it is *possible* that the author of the 'Pauline' interpretation of Gen 49.27 was none other than the apostle himself, it is also *possible* that this interpretation arose in Pauline circles, or elsewhere, after Paul's martyrdom. More evidence is necessary before we can decide between these possibilities.

Early Christianity was invariably exegetical and it was so from the very beginning. Christians, as early as we encounter them, were scouring the Jewish Scriptures for clear prophecies and hints of their Messiah. Finding prophecies of his apostles, including the apostle to the Gentiles, would have been part and parcel of the same process. If my rather bold suggestion that the 'Pauline exegesis' of Gen 49.27 reaches back to the apostle himself is accepted as largely correct, then we will have recovered an authentic piece of the apostle's teaching, heretofore unknown to us. If, on the other hand, this suggestion is rejected as overly daring, studies of the reception history of Paul and Pauline theology in early Christianity should no longer be able to neglect this important Old Testament text – for it was clearly indispensable for the earliest readers of Paul.⁷⁸

77 I owe this suggestion to Prof. Maarten J. J. Menken.

78 I would like to thank Profs. Larry Hurtado and Francis Watson for reading and commenting on this paper. It has been much improved from their observations and criticisms.