CHAPTER ONE
THE PURPOSE AND DESTINATION OF THE
DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO

At a perfunctory level of understanding, the interpretation of scripture in Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho presents us with interpretive issues directed toward a Jewish audience. Thus it appears clear that Justin’s choice and use of certain OT texts are made because of the presuppositions of his audience, who are Jews. The Dialogue has often been described as a foundational document for an understanding of the theological discussions and contacts between Christians and Jews of the second century.¹ This is based on the foundational understanding that the intended audience of the Dialogue was Jews, as a defense of the Christian faith to them.

This traditional view concerning the intended audience of the Dialogue was held by the majority of scholars until the twentieth century. But since then it has been faulted for being uncritical.² But it is not difficult to assert that the Dialogue was written to and for the Jews of the second century. Any casual reading of the document reveals its focus on the Law, the Jewish messianic hope, and the concept of Israel as the chosen people of God. Further, the two main participants, Justin, a Christian, and Trypho,³ a Jew, tends to

³ The information Justin gives us about Trypho can be collected from Dial. 1.1–3; 9.3; 16.2; 18.3; 38.1; 94.4. From this data L. W. Barnard (“The Old Testament in the Writings of Justin Martyr,” VT 14 [1964] 395–396) describes Trypho as a Jew who fled from the war in Palestine, spending much time in Greece and Corinth. His culture was Gentile because he states that he was instructed by Corinthus the Socratic in Argos. Trypho distinguishes himself from ‘our teachers’ and includes himself among those who have been warned against entering into discussions with Christians. Barnard believes this to be a good indication that Trypho was a layman and not a Rabbi—a fact corroborated by his lack of knowledge of the Hebrew language. Trypho’s “conception of Judaism will represent a position different from
support the idea that the target audience is Jewish. These appear to be distinctly Jewish concerns in order to convince them that the messianic expectation of Israel is found in Jesus.

In spite of this, however, the present century has offered several reasons for arguing against the traditionally held understanding of Jewish addressees. In this vein, some have argued for a pagan audience, some for a gentile Christian audience, and some for a combined Jewish and Christian audience. The major arguments for denying Jewish addressees will be summarized and examined below.

I. Pagan Destination

A. The Address to Marcus Pompeius

The possibility that the Dialogue is addressed to a man named Marcus Pompeius has been used to deny Jewish addressees and posit pagan addressees. Marcus is explicitly referred to in Dial. 141.5 as ὁ φίλαττε Μάρκε Πομπή. Earlier in the Dialogue there is simply a reference to φίλαττε. In spite of the fact that only 141.5 makes explicit reference to Marcus, Nilson takes the term φίλαττε to be a reference to him as well. Nilson believes he has good reason for so doing because of the mutilated state of the Greek text of the Dialogue. Thus, if

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5 Cosgrove, “Justin Martyr and the Emerging Christian Canon.”


7 I must acknowledge, at the outset, a relative dependence upon Stylianopoulos’s outstanding Appendix in Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law, 169–195.

8 Dial. 8.3.

9 Nilson, “To Whom is Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho Addressed?” 540.

10 Concerning the mutilation of the text of the Dialogue, the details are well-known. They centre mainly in the lost part of the Introduction and lacuna in 74.3 and a more serious lacuna in 73 where the exposition of Ps. 96 is suddenly interrupted and not resumed. From a quotation by Eusebius (H.e. 4.18.6–8) and internal evidence (Dial. 56.16; 85.4; 92.5) it is apparent that the discussion was presented as lasting two days or more. But there is no trace in the Dialogue either of the ending of the first day or the beginning of the second. See, H. P. Schneider, “Some Reflections on the Dialogue of Justin Martyr With Trypho,” SJT 15 (1962) 166.