

TARGUM ISAIAH 53
AND THE NEW TESTAMENT CONCEPT OF ATONEMENT

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Introduction

In the New Testament we find evidence of a tradition that applies the concept of Levitical atoning sacrifices to the death of Christ by using the Old Testament sacrificial categories.¹ Some passages (Rom. 3.25; Heb. 1.3-4; 2.17; 9.13; 1 Jn 2.2; 4.10) describe Christ's atonement in the imagery of the Day of Atonement ritual.² Other passages (Mt. 26.26-29; Mk 10.45; 14.22-25; Lk. 22.15-20; 1 Cor. 11.25; 1 Pet. 1.18-19) describe Christ's atonement in the imagery of the regular atoning sacrifices.

Of particular importance is that the typological interpretation of Christ's death as an atoning sacrifice in the New Testament has a close parallel in the typological interpretation of the Servant's role according to the Levitical atoning sacrifices in *Targum Isaiah*. The typological interpretation of the Servant's role according to the Levitical atoning sacrifices was implicit in the Hebrew text of Isaiah 53 and is now made explicit in targumist's interpretive rendering of the Hebrew text. *Targum Isaiah* preserves a tradition that typologically interpreted the Servant-Messiah according to the pattern of both the regular atoning sacrifices (*Targ. Isa.* 53.4, 12; cf. Lev. 4.20 etc.) and the sin offering on the Day of Atonement (*Targ. Isa.* 53.10; cf. Lev. 16.30). Moreover, the New Testament description of Jesus Christ's role as intercessor for

1. V. Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching* (London: Epworth, 1940), p. 187.

2. C. Spicq, 'L'origine johannique de la conception du Christ-prêtre dans l'Épître aux Hébreux', in O. Cullmann and P.H. Menoud (eds.), *Aux sources de la tradition chrétienne: Mélanges M. Goguel* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestle, 1950), pp. 258-69.

sinners has its close parallel in the Servant's role as intercessor for sinners in *Targum Isaiah* (53.4, 11, 12; cf. 1 Jn 2.1-2; Rom. 8.34; Heb. 7.25).

These findings become more significant when we consider the coincidences within the Targum that are found most prominently in the sayings of Jesus in which Jesus appears to have cited a version of the book of Isaiah that is closer to the Targum than to any other extant source.³

In this paper, I will examine selected passages in *Targum Isaiah* and attempt to shed light on the issue of the origin of the concept of atonement in the New Testament. The earlier contributions to the study of *Targum Isaiah* are primarily scholarly works from both Germany and England.⁴ The works of Stenning and North are the most comprehensive in their treatment of the subject, while others focus on the Servant passages only. To these scholarly contributions, Bruce Chilton has made a significant addition by identifying the two-tier exegetical framework used in the formation of *Targum Isaiah*.⁵

My work differs from that of other scholars primarily in the extent of coverage and in its focus. In terms of the sources, my work is narrower than the other works. While other portions of Isaiah 40-66 are also important to this discussion, in this study I will confine myself to an

3. B. Chilton, 'The Targumim and Judaism of the First Century', in J. Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (eds.), *Handbook of Oriental Studies. II. Judaism in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 115-50 (147); T.W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 78; M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 3rd edn, 1967), pp. 213-14.

4. G. Dalman, *Der leidende und der sterbende Messias der Synagoge im ersten nach-christlichen Jahrtausend* (Berlin: n.p., 1888); R.A. Aytoun, 'The Servant of the Lord in the Targum', *JTS* 23 (1922), pp. 172-80; P. Seidelin, 'Der Ebed Jahwe und die Messiasgestalt im Jesajatargum', *ZNW* 35 (1936), pp. 194-231; J.F. Stenning (ed.), *The Targum of Isaiah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953); H. Hegermann, *Jesaja 53 in Hexapla, Targum und Peschitta* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1954); J. Jeremias, 'Παῖς Θεοῦ', *TDNT*, V, pp. 677-717; C.R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948).

5. B. Chilton, *The Glory of Israel* (JSNTSup, 23; Sheffield: JSOT, 1983); *The Isaiah Targum* (The Aramaic Bible, 11; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987); and 'Salvific Exile in the Isaiah Targum', in James M. Scott (ed.), *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Conceptions* (JSJSup, 56; Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 239-48.

examination of the Servant passages that are relevant to the origin of the concept of atonement in the New Testament.

Antiquity of the Tradition in the Targum

Before examining these passages, a brief statement concerning the antiquity of the tradition in *Targum Isaiah* is in order. *Targum Isaiah* is usually considered part of the Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel, who lived in the first century BCE, but the dating of the Targum cannot be exactly determined, since the Talmud assigns some portions of it to Joseph ben Chija (c. 300 CE).⁶ The text now extant is presumably the result of an editorial process.

It is primarily Chilton's contribution that identified the two-tier editorial process of *Targum Isaiah*.⁷ Chilton compared the exegesis incorporated in *Targum Isaiah* with departures from the Hebrew text evidenced in the LXX, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, the scrolls of Qumran, the New Testament, and the rabbinic literature, and concluded that targumic traditions were incorporated within an exegetical framework, a version of Isaiah in Aramaic composed by a meturgeman who flourished between 70 and 135 CE. That work, according to Chilton, was completed by another meturgeman, associated with Joseph ben Chija.

Chilton makes an important point: 'Within that early framework, materials were incorporated which appear to reflect the interpretations of earlier periods, including the period of Jesus.'⁸ There is much evidence that the translation tradition preserved in *Targum Isaiah* is very old. Jeremias provides examples that point to the antiquity of *Targ. Isa. 53*:

Isa. 6:10. the HT reads: לֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם, LXX καὶ ἰάσομαι αὐτούς, Σ καὶ ἰάθῃ. The Tg. transl. very differently: וְיִשְׁתַּחֲבִיק לְהוֹי, 'and they shall be forgiven'; שְׁתַּחֲבִיק ('to heal') is confused with שְׁתַּחֲבִיק ('to remit'), Schl. Mk. on 4:12. This version of the text is very old, for it appears in sy^p: לֹא וּנְשַׁחֲבִיק and Mk. 4:12: καὶ ἀφεθῇ αὐτοῖς (cf. T.W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* [1948], 77...). As concerns Is. 53 in particular, it is

6. Aytoun, 'Servant', p. 172.

7. Chilton, *Glory of Israel*, p. 97; 'Salvific Exile', pp. 239-43.

8. B. Chilton, *Judaic Approaches to the Gospels* (University of South Florida International Studies in Formative Christianity and Judaism, 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), p. 251.

easy with the help of LXX, Peshitta, 'A, Σ, Θ, to give many instances of the antiquity of the text preserved in the Tg. A few examples may be offered: 1. Is. 52:13: on the age of the expression עֲבָדֵי מַשִּׁיחָא. 2. Is. 53:3b is referred by the Tg. (not the Heb. or LXX) to the turning aside of the Shekinah, as already in 'A; 3. Is. 53:4: for קָלֵינוּ 'our sicknesses', Tg. has חוֹבֵנָא, also LXX: ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν. 4. Is. 53:5: the LXX derives מְחַלֵּל from חָלַל po, 'to pierce': ἐτραυματίσθη, but the Tg. derives it from חָלַל pu., 'to be put to shame': שִׁיתָחַל 'he was profaned', so already 'A: βεβηλωμένος. 5. Is. 53:7: LXX and Itala derive נִגְשׁ from נִגְשׁ, 'he was mistreated', but the Tg. derives it from נִגְשׁ: 'he drew near', so already Σ and Vg. 6. Is. 53:9: the ref. to the judgment in Tg. is found already in LXX, 'A and Θ... 7. Is. 53:10: the LXX already has καθαρίσαι from דִּבְרָא, Tg. מְצַרְרָא (cf. Hegermann, I, 54-58).⁹

The LXX, the Peshitta, 'A, Σ, Θ and the New Testament together demonstrate the antiquity of *Targum Isaiah*. There are also evidences from Qumran that indicate the antiquity of *Targum Isaiah*. Of particular importance are two witnesses that are directly related to *Targum Isaiah* and four others that are indirectly related: (1) the messianic interpretation of *Targ. Isa.* 52.13 and 53.10 is paralleled by an interpretive alteration of the Hebrew text in 1QIsa^a 52.14.¹⁰ (2) In place of the Hebrew קָהַל in Isa. 53.10, the targumist seems to have read a similar verb form וַיַּחַלֵּל הוּא as attested in an Isaiah scroll from Qumran (1QIsa^a 53.10). (3) Minute remains of both *Targum Leviticus* (4QtgLev) and *Targum Job* (4QtgJob; 11QtgJob) were discovered in Qumran caves 4 and 11. J.H. Charlesworth argues on the basis of this that 'it is now clear that the earliest traditions in the other, but much later, targums must be included in an assessment of early Judaism'.¹¹ (4) The Tannaitic authorities (*b. Šab.* 115a) state the antiquity of written

9. Jeremias, 'Παῖς Θεοῦ', *TDNT*, V, pp. 692-93 n. 290.

10. W.H. Brownlee, 'The Servant of the Lord in the Qumran Scrolls', *BASOR* 132 (1953), pp. 8-15 (11). The variant is found in 1QIsa^a 52.14, which may be translated 'As many were astonished at you—I so anointed (מִשְׁחָתִי) his appearance beyond anyone (else), and his form beyond that of (other) sons of men.' The difference between מִשְׁחָתִי in 1QIsa^a 52.14 and מִשְׁחָתָא in the MT is only one consonant. As suggested by Brownlee, the variant reading cannot be correct since it is not suited to the context; rather, it is a pun upon the word מִשְׁחָתָא ('marred'), which was made for the purpose of interpretation by adding a single Hebrew letter yod (י). This is the clearest case of alteration for the purpose of giving the Servant a messianic interpretation.

11. J.H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1983), I and II, p. xxvii.

Targum. According to Churgin, ‘the official Targumim were in a definite shape in the time of R. Akiba’ (second century CE), and ‘Certain traces in the Targum carry unmistakable evidence of a Babylonian re-cast, which was, however, of a very limited scope’, and ‘the substance was left untouched’.¹² (5) The author of the *Habakkuk Scroll* seems to have borrowed his interpretation of Hab. 1.6 directly from the *Targum to the Prophets*.¹³ (6) There is evidence for *Targum Jonathan* at the time of Josephus.¹⁴

An Examination of the Passages Pertaining to Atonement

Targum Isaiah 53.4a

In the previous section, I have shown that the traditions in *Targum Isaiah* may have been in circulation prior to the Christian era. In the following section, I will demonstrate that *Targum Isaiah* typologically interprets the Servant’s role according to the Levitical atoning sacrifices by examining the selected passages in *Targum Isaiah* pertaining to the concept of atonement. *Targum Isaiah* 53.4a is the first passage to consider in this regard. Juxtaposing the MT and the Targum with the declaratory formula in Lev. 4.20 will show how the Targum made the idea of atonement explicit:

12. P. Churgin, *Targum Jonathan to the Prophets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), pp. 19, 42.

13. N. Wieder, ‘Habakkuk Scroll and the Targum’, *JJS* 4 (1953), pp. 14-18; W.H. Brownlee, ‘The Habakkuk Midrash and Targum of Jonathan’, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 7 (1956), pp. 169-86.

14. R. Marcus, ‘Preface’ to *Josephus with English Translation* (LCL, 5; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), p. x.

<p><i>Targ. Onq. Lev.</i> 4.20b¹⁵ ויכפר עליהון כהנא</p> <p>The priest shall make atonement for them</p> <p>וישתבק להון and they shall be forgiven.</p>	<p>Isa. 53.4^a MT¹⁶</p> <p>אָבֵן חָלָּנוּ הוּא נִשָּׂא וּמְכַאֲבֵינוּ סִבָּלָם</p> <p>and carried our diseases.</p> <p>Surely he has borne our infirmities</p>	<p><i>Targ. Isa. 53.4</i>^{a17}</p> <p>בכין על חובנא הוא יבעי</p> <p>Then he shall pray on behalf of our transgressions</p> <p>ועויתנא בדיליה ישתבקן and our iniquities shall be pardoned for his sake.</p>
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Two ideas are assumed here:¹⁸ (1) a close relationship exists between suffering and sins. The Targum treats infirmities and diseases in the Hebrew text as transgressions and iniquities. (2) The Targum wanted to make the implicit idea of atonement in the Hebrew text explicit. As the Targum stands, it clearly identifies the Servant's intercession with priestly atonement, which obtains divine forgiveness. Of particular importance is the targumist's choice of particular parallel expressions in his rendering of the Hebrew text. There is a close affinity between the declaratory formula of *Targ. Onq. Lev.* 4.20b and that of *Targ. Isa.* 53.4a, which seems to be no coincidence. *Targ. Onq. Lev.* 4.20 renders the Hebrew text literally, and agrees with *Targ. Isa.* 53.4a in the second part of the formula. The Servant's vicarious bearing of infirmities is rendered with a phrase identical to *Targ. Onq. Lev.* 4.20 in its crucial verb form *ישתבקן* and its meaning, which implies that the Servant's

15. I use here *Targ. Onq. Lev.* 4.20b to show its correspondence with *Targ. Isa.* 53.4. The consonantal text of Leviticus in *Targum Onqelos* is hereafter quoted from the text adopted by I. Drazin, *Targum Onkelos to Leviticus* (New York: Ktav, 1994). *Targum Onqelos* is very faithful to the Hebrew text, using a woodenly literal translation. One finds none of the free paraphrase or interpretive additions that are found in *Targum Isaiah*.

16. Unless otherwise specified, the scriptural quotations are from the NRSV for the English translation, from the *UBSGNT*⁴ for the New Testament Greek text, and from Rahlfs' edition of the Greek Old Testament, Brenton's translation for the English translation of the LXX, and *BHS* for the Hebrew text.

17. The consonantal text of *Targum Isaiah* hereinafter is quoted from *Codex Orientalis* 2211 of the British Museum as shown in Stenning's work. As far as the text of *Targ. Isa.* 53 is concerned, both Stenning and Sperber depend primarily upon *Codex Orientalis* 2211 of the British Museum; thus, their texts are virtually the same.

18. Hegermann, *Jesaja 53*, p. 77.

role is understood typologically in the same way as Levitical atoning sacrifices.

These ideas seem to reflect an old Jewish tradition that is probably pre-Christian. *Targum Isaiah* agrees with the LXX in its handling of illnesses as transgressions. The LXX renders the Hebrew word קָלָה with the Greek ἀμαρτία and interprets the whole verse in terms of the Servant bearing the sins of the unnamed ‘we’. Furthermore, this understanding of illness as sin is also found in Mk 4.12, which follows *Targ. Isa.* 6.10, and this implies the antiquity of the tradition.¹⁹ Thus, one finds here a pre-Christian tradition that existed in early Judaism.

The observation that *Targ. Isa.* 53.4a has this pre-Christian tradition is very important to our discussion, because the expression, ‘our iniquities shall be pardoned for his sake’, in *Targ. Isa.* 53.4a (cf. 53.5, 12) finds its closest parallel in the statement ‘Your sins are forgiven *for his name’s sake*’ in 1 Jn 2.12. The verbal correspondences between *Targ. Isa.* 53.4a and 1 Jn 2.12 may indicate the presence of an exegetical tradition that was employed by both. Moreover, this expression in *Targ. Isa.* 53.4a finds its close verbal and conceptual correspondences in the sayings of Jesus when he declares forgiveness of sins to the paralytic (‘your sins are forgiven’ in Mt. 9.2, 5; Mk 2.5, 9; Lk. 5.20, 23) and the sinful woman (Lk. 7.48). This may imply that this particular expression was used in the early church in connection with Jesus’ sin-forgiving ministry in order to express the fulfillment of the Isaianic Servant prophecy.

Targum Isaiah 53.5

Targ. Isa. 53.5 reflects the same tradition that interprets illnesses as sins. This verse is particularly important for what it implies about how one obtains divine forgiveness. Juxtaposing *Targ. Isa.* 53.5cd with the MT will elucidate this fact.

c	<p style="text-align: center;">Isa. 53.5c-d MT</p> <p style="text-align: center;">מוֹסֵר שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ עָלָיו</p> <p>upon him was the punishment that made us whole,</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Targ. Isa.</i> 53.5c-d</p> <p style="text-align: center;">וּבְאֵל פְּנִיָּה שְׁלָמִיָּהּ יִסְגֵי עַלְנָא</p> <p>by his teaching shall his peace be multiplied upon us,</p>
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19. Seidelin, ‘Ebed Jahwe’, p. 212 n. 55; Manson, *Teaching of Jesus*, p. 78; Black, *Aramaic Approach*, pp. 213-14; B. Chilton, ‘Four Types of Comparison between the Targumim and the New Testament,’ *Journal for the Aramaic Bible* 2 (2000), pp. 163-88 (166-67).

d	וּבְחִבְרָתוֹ נִרְפָּאֵלְנוּ:	וּבִדְנִתְנַהֵי לְפִתְגְמוֹהֵי חוּבְנָא יִשְׁתַּבְּקוּ לְנוּ
	and by his bruises we are healed.	And by our devotion to his words our transgressions shall be forgiven us.

As in *Targ. Isa.* 53.4, in this section illnesses are understood as sins, because the Hebrew נִרְפָּאֵלְנוּ ('we are healed') is represented by the Aramaic יִשְׁתַּבְּקוּ לְנוּ ('we are forgiven'). Jeremias contends that this was the result of confusion between the Hebrew רָפָא ('to heal') and רָפָה ('to remit').²⁰ However, that does not seem to be the case here. The same verb רָפָא was correctly rendered as healing in *Targ. Isa.* 19.22 and 30.26:²¹ 'And the Lord...shall heal them (וַיִּשְׁיִנוּ)...and shall heal (וַיִּשִׁי) them' (*Targ. Isa.* 19.22); 'and shall heal (וַיִּשִׁי) the sickness of his wound' (*Targ. Isa.* 30.26). In *Targum Isaiah*, the same Aramaic verb שִׁבַּק is used to render five different Hebrew verbs (רָפָא, נָשָׂא, עָזַב, כָּפַר, רָצָה). The word occurs 23 times in *Targum Isaiah*, all at crucial moments (1.4, 6, 13, 14, 28; 2.6, 9; 5.6; 6.10; 10.3; 17.10, 11; 18.6; 27.9, 10; 28.10; 33.24; 40.2; 53.4, 5, 6, 12). Except when rendering עָזַב, it means 'to forgive', and, as observed in *Targ. Isa.* 53, the targumist sometimes just adds שִׁבַּק without any warrant from the Hebrew text (1.13; 2.6; 5.6; 17.11; 28.10; 53.4, 6, 12). Thus, the word שִׁבַּק is used as a *leitwort*, having been deliberately inserted at crucial moments to reflect the targumist's theological emphasis on divine forgiveness.

The manner of obtaining divine forgiveness in v. 5 differs from v. 4 in the Targum. Whereas in v. 4 sin is said to be 'forgiven for his sake', in v. 5 it is said to be 'forgiven by their devotion to the Servant's words of teaching'. Two principal questions arise about the mode of divine forgiveness in *Targ. Isa.* 53.4-5.

One is about the exegetical practice of the targumist: How was he able to interpret *Targ. Isa.* 53.5c-d the way he did? The answer to this question is that the Hebrew מוֹסֵר can be interpreted as 'teaching'. In *Targ. Isa.* 53.5c, the targumist understood the Hebrew מוֹסֵר as 'teaching', which is frequently the correct meaning, but not in this context. Only atomistic exegesis can understand מוֹסֵר as the targumist did, but he did employ even more atomistic exegesis to interpret the Hebrew

20. Jeremias, 'Παῖς Θεοῦ', *TDNT*, V, p. 692 n. 290.

21. J.B. Van Zijl, *A Concordance to the Targum of Isaiah* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), p. 185.

בְּחִבְרָתוֹ as ‘by our devotion to his words’ in 53.5d. The Targum seems to have achieved this result by altering the vocalization of בְּחִבְרָתוֹ to בְּחִבְרָתוֹ (‘in his company’—through which we gather around him and he is with us), taking the root from חִבְרָה ‘company, companion’ (Job 34.8).²²

The second question, about the mode of divine forgiveness in *Targ. Isa.* 53.4 and *Targ. Isa.* 53.5, is: Why did the targumist use different expressions in the two verses? He seems to have introduced two steps of salvation here: (1) Eschatological forgiveness is decisively granted with the coming restoration of Israel that is totally by grace mediated through the Servant. (2) After this decisive forgiveness and the restoration of covenant fellowship with YHWH, divine forgiveness will continue to be granted to those who remain in fellowship with the Servant through his teaching in the covenant community. As discussed, the rendering of *Targ. Isa.* 53.5d may represent a different vocalization of the Hebrew text, thus reading בְּחִבְרָתוֹ (‘in his company’) instead of the MT’s בְּחִבְרָתוֹ (‘by his bruise’). The Hebrew חִבְרָה can also mean ‘union’ or ‘ally’ or ‘fellowship’, and its meaning is identical to the Greek κοινωσία. The same idea may lie behind the use of the Greek κοινωσία in 1 Jn 1.3, 6, 7 and the eucharistic tradition in Paul (1 Cor. 10.16-17; 11.25; cf. 1.9; 2 Cor. 6.14; 8.4; 9.13), and Paul’s doctrine of union with Christ.

Targum Isaiah 53.6c

Although people are forgiven for the Servant’s sake, it is ultimately YHWH who grants this forgiveness. *Targ. Isa.* 53.6c presents this idea of divine sovereignty:

<p>Isa. 53.6c MT וַיִּהְיֶה הַפְּנִיעַ בּוֹ אֶת עוֹן כָּלֵנוּ:</p>		<p><i>Targ. Isa.</i> 53.6c וּמִן קִדְמֵי יְהוָה הוּת רַעוּא לְמַשְׁבַּק חוּבֵי כּוּלְנָא בְּדִיל יְהוָה</p>
<p>and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.</p>		<p>but it was the Lord’s good pleasure to forgive the transgressions of us all for his sake.</p>

Three observations are in order here. (1) The expression ‘lay the iniquity on him’ was clearly understood by the targumist in the sense of an atonement that produces divine forgiveness. Here we find again the

22. Seidelin, ‘Ebed Jahwe’, p. 213; Hegermann, *Jesaja 53*, p. 81.

Targum's interpretive paraphrase (associative translation) of the Servant's atoning ministry to obtain divine forgiveness, as in v. 4 and v. 5 (and also in v. 12). By associative translation, I mean a translation technique used by the translator to render a phrase in the *Grundtext* by employing a similar phraseology in a parallel text.²³ As has been argued, the declaratory formula 'the priest shall make atonement for them and they shall be forgiven' (Lev. 4.20, 26, 31; 5.10, 13, 16, 18; 6.7) lies behind this interpretation. For the targumist, atonement is identical to divine forgiveness since atonement is followed by divine forgiveness, but one cannot be sure how he understood *הִפְנִיֵּעַ*: whether in the sense of *bonam partem* ('YHWH let the intercession be upon him concerning the iniquity of us all') or in the sense of *malam partem* ('YHWH laid the iniquity of us all upon him').²⁴ In the former case, it is difficult to interpret the accusative case of *אֵת עוֹן*. Either way, the targumist surely understood the Servant's ministry in the sense of the atoning sacrifices in Leviticus. (2) By adding the phrase 'for his sake', the targumist strikes the same note that the Servant is mediator of atonement. (3) Of four occurrences of the verb *שָׁבַק* in *Targ. Isa. 53*, this is the only place where it is found in the active voice with YHWH as its subject the way it is in the New Covenant forgiveness passage of Jer. 31.34. Clearly the emphasis here is on divine initiative in forgiveness and the goodness of YHWH's will towards his people.

Targum Isaiah 53.10

In *Targ. Isa. 53.10*, the Servant's sufferings are transferred to the remnant of his people, and the sufferings are interpreted as YHWH's atoning action.

a	<p style="text-align: center;">Isa. 53.10 MT</p> <p style="text-align: center;">וַיְהִיָּה חֶפְזָא דְּכַאֵוּ הַחֵלִי</p> <p>Yet it was the good pleasure of the LORD to crush him with pain.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Targ. Isa. 53.10</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">וּמִן קִדְמָא יְהוּהּ הוּת רַעוּא לְמִצְרַף וּלְדַבְּאָה יֵת שְׂאֲרָא דְעַמִּיָּה</p> <p>And it was the Lord's good pleasure to refine and to purify <i>the remnant of his people</i>,</p>
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23. M.L. Klein, 'Associative and Complementary Translation in the Targumim', *Eretz-Israel* 16 (1982), pp. 134-40.

24. Hegermann, *Jesaja 53*, p. 82.

b	<p>אִם־תָּשִׂים אֶשְׁם נַפְשׁוֹ וְרָאָה זָרַע</p>	<p>בְּדִיל לְנִקְאָה מִחֻבִּין נַפְשֵׁהוֹן יַחֲזוֹן בְּמַלְכוּת מְשִׁיחֵהוֹן יִסְגּוֹן בְּנִין וּבָנִין</p>
	<p>When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring,</p>	<p>in order to cleanse their soul from sin. <i>They shall look upon the kingdom of their Messiah</i>, they shall multiply sons and daughters,</p>
c	<p>וְאֶרְיַד יָמָיו</p>	<p>יִירָכֹון יוֹמֵין</p>
	<p>and shall prolong his days;</p>	<p>they shall prolong days,</p>
d	<p>וְחֻפֵּן יְהוָה בְּיָדוֹ יִצְלַח:</p>	<p>וְעַבְדֵי אֲוֵרִיתָא דִּיהוּה בְּרַעוּתֵיהּ יִצְלַחוֹן</p>
	<p>through him the good pleasure of the LORD shall prosper.</p>	<p>and <i>they that perform the law of the Lord</i> shall prosper in his good pleasure.</p>

This verse may well be called a showcase of violent wresting of the Hebrew text to remove elements of vicarious suffering from the Servant’s role, but what concerns one the most are the variant readings behind *Targ. Isa.* 53.10 and their implications for divine forgiveness.²⁵

Two variant readings may lie behind the rendering of *Targ. Isa.* 53.10a, which consistently describes the sufferings of Israelites as YHWH’s gracious way of atoning for their sins: (1) Like the LXX καθαρίσαι, *Targ. Isa.* 53.10a has לְמַצְרֵף (‘to refine, cleanse’) for דְּכַפָּאוֹ which is then understood by the targumist as an Aramaism.²⁶ (2) In place of the Hebrew הִחֲלִי the similar verb form וַיִּחַלֵּלֵהוּ seems to have been read by the targumist, as attested in an Isaiah scroll from Qumran (1QIsa^a 53.10). *Targ. Onq.* Lev. 1.9 translates יִרְחֹץ with יִחַלֵּל in the sense of ‘to wash’, which suggests that the targumist read something like וַיִּחַלֵּלֵהוּ or וַחֲלַלֵּהוּ (inf. Piel) in his *Grundtext* and rendered it in the sense of ‘to wash’.²⁷ Thus, the targumist translated the verse to mean that the sufferings of the remnant of Israel are all atoning acts of cleansing.

25. Both the sufferings and the rewards of the Servant are transferred to the people of Israel, and the importance of obeying the law is emphasized as the essence of religion. Both features are characteristic of current interpretation of the Jewish schools.

26. Hegermann, *Jesaja 53*, p. 88.

27. Hegermann, *Jesaja 53*, p. 87; North, *Suffering Servant*, p. 231; A. Sperber (ed.), *The Bible in Aramiac* (5 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1959-73), I, p.165.

Significantly, the LXX agrees that this verse refers to divine cleansing. That implies the antiquity of this tradition.²⁸ Thus, one may perhaps have here an old interpretive tradition whose trace is still left.

The purpose of divine cleansing is further expressed as divine forgiveness in *Targ. Isa.* 53.10b: *בדיל לנקאה מחובין נפשהון*. This is clearly reminiscent of the declaratory formula of Lev. 16.30. Two principal questions arise concerning *Targ. Isa.* 53.10b: (1) How did the Targum draw this meaning from the Hebrew text? (2) Is there any particular relationship between *Targ. Isa.* 53.10a-b and the sin offering on the Day of Atonement?

The first question has to do with the exegetical practices of the targumist. There may be multiple answers to the question. The targumist may have had a *Grundtext* with a variant reading, *מאת שים* instead of *שם השים*.²⁹ However, it is not likely, because the construction *שם מאת* does not agree with the general rule that the preposition *מאת* ('from being with') takes a personal pronoun or person as its object in the Hebrew Old Testament.³⁰ It is more probable that the targumist understood the Hebrew expression *שם השים* figuratively and rendered it with *בדיל לנקאה מחובין נפשהון* ('in order to *cleanse their soul from sin*'). This choice of understanding *שם השים* as 'to cleanse their soul from sin' is very important in that the former results in the latter in the sin offering on the Day of Atonement. This particular interpretation shows that *שם* was understood in the sense of a sin offering that results in cleansing from sin (as on the Day of Atonement). This brings us to the second question.

Juxtaposing Isa. 53.10a-b with Lev. 16.30 shows how they correspond:

28. Dalman, *Messias*, p. 67; Hegermann, *Jesaja 53*, p. 88; Jeremias, 'Παῖς Θεοῦ', *TDNT*, V, p. 693 n. 290.

29. Hegermann, *Jesaja 53*, p. 88.

30. W. Gesenius and F. Buhl, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1949), XVII, p. 77.

Lev. 16.30 ³¹	<i>Targ. Onq. Lev. 16.30</i>	<i>Targ. Isa. 53.10a-b</i>
יְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְמַהֲרָא אֶתְכֶם	יְכַפֵּר עַל יְכוּן לְדַכְּאָה יְתְכוּן	רְעוּא לְמַצְרָף וּלְדַכְּאָה יְת שְׂאָרָא דְעַמִּיָּה
atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you	atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you	to refine and to purify the remnant of his people

Lev. 16.30 and *Targ. Isa. 53.10a-b* agree in their use of such terms as cleansing from sin, and in identifying the beneficiaries of this cleansing as Israelites. This agreement points to a tradition that interpreted Isaiah 53 in terms of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement. Thus, in its treatment of the Servant's vicarious roles, *Targ. Isa. 53* seems to have used all three of the crucial expressions of divine forgiveness in the Old Testament: (1) the declaration of the Levitical atoning sacrifices in Lev. 4.20, etc. (*Targ. Isa. 53. 4, 12*); (2) that of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement (v. 10); and (3) YHWH's promise of divine forgiveness in Jeremiah's New Covenant passage (v. 6). By transferring the sufferings of the Servant to the remnant of his people, the targumist identifies the sufferings with the sin offering on the Day of Atonement. A difference between these two is present only in the immediate nature of atonement in the Targum, where YHWH is the one who cleanses them.

The rest of *Targ. Isa. 53.10* is a typical example of the targumist's rendering of the Hebrew text to harmonize the teaching of the prophet with the current interpretation of the Jewish schools. His emphasis on the messianic kingdom and obedience to the law as the basis for religion is clearly shown in his interpretive additions:³² 'the kingdom of their Messiah' in *Targ. Isa. 53.10b* and 'perform the law of the Lord' in *Targ. Isa. 53.10d*.

Targum Isaiah 53.12

With regard to the New Testament concept of atonement, *Targ. Isa. 53.12* is particularly important in three respects: (1) It still contains a statement that the Servant had submitted to death. Elsewhere, the targumist does away with the sufferings of the Servant-Messiah as observed in *Targ. Isa. 53.7, 10*, in which 'the exaltation of the Servant

31. Lev. 16.30 is a later version of the declaratory formula for divine forgiveness used in atoning sacrifices in Leviticus (4.20, 26, 31, 35; 5.10, 13, 16, 18, 26; 19.22) and Numbers (15.25, 26, 28).

32. Chilton, *Glory of Israel*, pp. 99-100.

is applied to the messiah, but his sufferings fall in part upon Israel, in part upon the Gentiles'.³³ How this statement was left unchanged, when all similar statements had been interpreted away, is difficult to say. Scholars offer a variety of explanations for this inconsistency.³⁴ (2) Again, the Servant's sin bearing (Isa. 53.12e) and his intercessory ministry (vv. 12-13) in the Hebrew text are replaced with his intercession for sinners (*Targ. Isa.* 53.12e) and divine forgiveness in the passive voice (vv. 12-13), respectively, in *Targum Isaiah*. (3) *Targ. Isa.* 53.12-13 changes the tense of the Hebrew text from the past to the future. Juxtaposing *Targ. Isa.* 53.12 with the MT shows how the targumist understood the Hebrew text:

	Isa. 53.12 MT	<i>Targ. Isa.</i> 53.12
a	לְכֵן אֶחְלֶקְלוֹ בְּרַבִּים	בְּכִי אֶפְלִיג לִיָּה בִּיזוּת עַמּוּמִין סַגִּיאִין וְיִת נַכְסֵי בְּרַכִּין תְּקַפִּין
	Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,	Then will I divide unto him the spoil of many peoples and the riches of strong cities
b	וְאֶת־עֲצוּמִים יַחְלֶק שָׁלֵל	יִפְלִיג עַדְאָה חַלְף
	and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,	he shall divide the booty,
c	תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר הִעֲרָה לְמוֹת נַפְשׁוֹ	דְּמַסַּר לְמוֹתָא נַפְשִׁיה
	because he poured out himself to death	because he delivered his soul unto death
d	וְאֶת־פְּשָׁעִים נִמְנָה	וְיִת מְרוּדִיא שְׁעֵבִיד לְאוּרִיתוֹ
	and was numbered with the transgressors;	and subjected the rebellious to the law;
e	וְהוּא חָטְא־רַבִּים נָשָׂא	וְהוּא עַל חוּבִין יַבְעִי
	yet he bore the sin of many,	and he shall make intercession for many transgressions,
f	וְלִפְשָׁעִים יִפְגִּיעַ:	וְלְמְרוּדִיא יִשְׁתַּבֵּיִק לִיָּה
	and made intercession for the transgressors.	and the rebellious shall be forgiven for his sake.

Targum Isaiah 53.12c may be considered an old tradition still left untouched, since that statement of suffering agrees with the Hebrew

33. Chilton, *Glory of Israel*, p. 91.

34. Dalman, *Messais*, pp. 48-49; Jeremias, 'Παῖς Θεοῦ', *TDNT*, V, p. 695; Seidelin, 'Ebed Jahwe', p. 215; Hegermann, *Jesaja 53*, pp. 91-92; Aytoun, 'Servant', p. 177.

text.³⁵ The Hebrew הִטָּה in the MT means literally ‘he poured out’, and is correctly rendered by the Aramaic semantic equivalent מָסַר. So why did the later redactor leave this particular verse untouched? Jeremias suggests that the passage was left untouched because it does not necessarily imply that death has taken place; willingness to face the danger of death might be all that is intended.³⁶ In other words, the redactor read it figuratively and left it untouched. However, that does not seem likely. *Targum Isaiah* characteristically avoids the literal translation of many figures of speech. When the figurative language of the prophet is not indicated by the preposition ‘like’ or ‘as’, the targumist gives an explanatory paraphrase.³⁷ After paraphrasing all similar expressions, why did he leave this crucial one untouched? K. Koch explains that the targumist wanted to translate the sacred text faithfully, but was not sure what the passage meant, and so left it open to various interpretations.³⁸ Agreeing with Hegermann, Chilton considers it ‘far more plausible to suppose that the meturgeman, who was unperturbed by Christian claims, was influenced by primitive messianology as he rendered the MT’.³⁹

The choice of alternative expressions in *Targ. Isa.* 53.12e-f seems to reflect a tradition that typically interpreted the Servant’s role in Isaiah 53 in accordance with the atoning sacrifices in the Levitical sacrificial system. Compare both Isa. 53.12 and *Targ. Isa.* 53.12 with Lev. 4.20:

<i>Targ. Onq.</i> Lev. 4.20b	Isa. 53.12e-f MT	<i>Targ. Isa.</i> 53.12e-f
ויכפר עליהון כהנא The priest shall make atonement for them,	והוא חטא־רבים נָשָׂא yet he bore the sin of many,	והוא על חובין יבעי and he shall make intercession for many transgressions,
וישתבק להון and they shall be forgiven.	ולפֿשעים יפְגִיעַ: and made intercession for the transgressors.	ולמרודיא ישתביק ליה and the rebellious shall be forgiven for his sake.

Again, the emphasis in *Targum Isaiah* is on the intercessory ministry of the Servant and the consequent divine forgiveness, which are

35. Hegermann, *Jesaja 53*, p. 92.

36. Jeremias, ‘Παῖς Θεοῦ’, *TDNT*, V, p. 694 n. 301.

37. Stenning, *Targum of Isaiah*, p. xiii.

38. K. Koch, ‘Messias und Sündenvergebung in Jesaja 53-Targum’, *JSJ* 3 (1972), pp. 117-48 (148).

39. Chilton, *Glory of Israel*, p. 92.

expressed in the imperfect tense (future). This change of tense may be explained in two ways: (1) The targumist harmonized it with Lev. 4.20b. The expression יִשְׁתַּבֵּי־ק occurs in both Lev. 4.20 and *Targ. Isa.* 53.4, 5, 12. (2) He wanted to emphasize the eschatological nature of messianic intercession for sinners. Whatever the motive of the targumist may have been, Isa. 53.12-13 was certainly understood as referring to the future intercession of the Messiah for sinners.⁴⁰ Also, Aquila and Theodotion render Isa. 53.12-13 with the future tense. Thus, *Targ. Isa.* 53.12-13 may have preserved a pre-Christian tradition. This tradition may lie behind the New Testament passages that describe the role of Christ as intercessor for sinners (1 Jn 2.1-2: καὶ ἐάν τις ἁμάρτη, παράκλητον ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον [יִשְׁתַּבֵּי־ק Isa. 53.11c] καὶ αὐτὸς ἰλασμός ἐστιν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν [יִשְׁתַּבֵּי־ק Isa. 53.10b; περὶ ἁμαρτίας Isa. 53.10b LXX]; Rom. 8.34: ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν; Heb. 7.25: εἰς τὸ ἐντυγχάνειν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν).

Summary and Conclusion

In my attempt to establish a reference point for the origin of the New Testament concept of atonement, I have examined the selected passages in *Targum Isaiah*. The Targum has been seen to be important, with reference to the interpretation of the Servant passage and to the New Testament concept of atonement, in three respects: (1) *Targum Isaiah* had authoritative status, representing authoritative views before and during the period of the early church. (2) It probably provides the earliest messianic interpretation of the Servant passages, along with the LXX. (3) It interprets the person and role of the Servant of *Targ. Isa.* 53 as the antitype of the Levitical atoning sacrifices.

Our study demonstrates that the typological interpretation of the Isaianic Servant can be detected in three different expressions of divine forgiveness employed in *Targ. Isa.* 53: (1) a phrase using יִשְׁתַּבֵּי־ק (the passive form of קָבַשׁ , ‘to forgive, pardon’) (*Targ. Isa.* 53.4, 5, 12) that corresponds to the declaratory formula of Lev. 4.20b concerning the atoning sacrifices; (2) a phrase using the language of cleansing (*Targ. Isa.* 53.10) that corresponds to the declaratory formula of Lev. 16.30

40. Hegermann, *Jesaja 53*, p. 94; J.T. Forestell, *Targumic Traditions and the New Testament* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1979), p. 119.

concerning the sin offering on the Day of Atonement; (3) a phrase characterized by its use of the active form of שָׁבַח (*Targ. Isa.* 53.6), which corresponds to the forgiveness in Jeremiah's New Covenant prophecy (Jer. 31.34).

All three expressions find their close parallels in the New Testament writings. The expression, 'For his sake our iniquities will be forgiven', in *Targum Isaiah* (53.4, 5, 12) finds its closest parallel in the statement 'Your sins are forgiven for his name's sake' (1 Jn 2.12). The verbal correspondences between *Targ. Isa.* 53.4 and the New Testament passages (1 Jn 2.12; Mt. 9.2, 5; Mk 2.5, 9; Lk. 5.20, 23; 7.48) may be an indication of the presence of an exegetical tradition that was employed by both. In particular, this expression may have been used in the early church in connection with Jesus' sin-forgiving ministry in order to express the fulfillment of the Isaianic Servant prophecy.

The allusion to the Day of Atonement ritual finds its close parallels in the New Testament uses of the imagery of the Day of Atonement ritual (Rom. 3.25; Heb. 1.3-4; 2.17; 9.13; 1 Jn 2.2; 4.10), while the allusion to the New Covenant prophecy also finds its close parallels in the New Testament (Lk. 22.20; Rom. 11.26-27; 1 Cor. 11.23-26; Heb. 2.16, 17). The Lord's Supper tradition (Mt. 26.26-29; Mk 14. 22-25; Lk. 22.15-20; 1 Cor. 11.23-26), in particular, fuses the concept of atonement with the New Covenant prophecy. Common in all four accounts of the Lord's Supper tradition are the covenant motif and atonement motif.⁴¹ First Corinthians 11.25 and Lk. 22.20 explicitly connect the new covenant with the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

Of particular importance are the repeated occurrences of the two thematic statements in *Targ. Isa.* 52.13–53.12, 'he shall make intercession for transgressions' (53.4, 11, 12) and 'our iniquities (or transgressions) are forgiven for his sake' (53.4, 5, 12; cf. 53.6). This study has demonstrated that both of these statements are either interpretive additions or paraphrases introduced deliberately by the translator, which implies the importance of these two ideas in *Targum Isaiah*. As argued, they may represent an ancient tradition that interpreted the messianic role of the Servant in terms of cultic atonement and consequent divine forgiveness. The same tradition may lie behind

41. O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 64; W.G. Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament according to its Major Witnesses: Jesus–Paul–John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), p. 91.

the New Testament passages that describe the role of Christ as atoning sacrifice (Rom. 3.25; 1 Pet. 1.18-19; 1 Jn 2.2, 12; 4.10) and heavenly intercessor (Rom. 8.34; Heb. 7.25; 1 Jn 2.1).