

2008

Targums, the New Testament, and Biblical Theology of the Messiah

Michael B. Shepherd

Cedarville University, mshepherd@cedarville.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/
biblical_and_ministry_studies_publications](http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/biblical_and_ministry_studies_publications)



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Shepherd, Michael B., "Targums, the New Testament, and Biblical Theology of the Messiah" (2008). *Biblical and Theological Studies Faculty Publications*. 294.

http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/biblical_and_ministry_studies_publications/294

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Cedarville, a service of the Centennial Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in Biblical and Theological Studies Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Cedarville. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@cedarville.edu.

TARGUMS, THE NEW TESTAMENT, AND BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE MESSIAH

MICHAEL B. SHEPHERD

I. INTRODUCTION

Renewed interest in the relationship of the Targums to the NT was ignited by three events during the mid-twentieth century: Paul Kahle's publication of fragments from the Cairo Geniza; the discovery of Targums at Qumran; and Alejandro Díez Macho's discovery of *Targum Neofiti*.¹ Parallel to these developments in biblical studies was the research on the supposed Aramaic substratum of the NT.² Initially there was a great deal of excitement over the possible pre-Christian dating of the Palestinian Targums. But eventually the smoke cleared, and the last thirty years have now seen a substantial amount of reevaluation of the evidence.

Regardless of the dates of the extant Targums, it is universally recognized that targumic tradition goes back to a very early period and that the Targums display similar methods of exegesis to those of the NT.³ Of course, this does not mean that the NT authors were necessarily dependent upon the Targums,⁴ but there does seem to be what Martin McNamara has called "convergence of evidence" when the conceptual frameworks and readings of biblical texts are compared. Much work has been done on the shared thought world of the Targums and the NT.⁵ But perhaps the more fruitful research problem is still that which can be tied down to specific texts. The Targumists

* Michael B. Shepherd is assistant professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Louisiana College, 1140 College Dr., Pineville, LA 71360.

¹ Roger Le Déaut, "The Current State of Targumic Studies," *BTB* 4 (1974) 3–32.

² E.g. Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (3d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1967); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays* (SBLMS 25; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979); Bruce Chilton, *Targumic Approaches to the Gospels: Essays in the Mutual Definition of Judaism and Christianity* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986); Max Wilcox, "The Aramaic Background of the New Testament," in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in Their Historical Context* (ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara; JSOTSup 166; Sheffield: JSOT, 1994) 362–78.

³ Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 8–9.

⁴ According to G. Vermes, the NT is simply a dated segment in relation to undated material (i.e. the Targums) within a developing tradition (*Jesus and the World of Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983] 85–87).

⁵ E.g. Roger Le Déaut, *The Message of the New Testament and the Aramaic Bible (Targum)* (trans. Stephen Miletic; Subsidia biblica 5; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982) 37–43.

and NT authors were not textual critics seeking to establish original readings, but they were interpreters of Scripture, and it is in this regard that they both show remarkable insight into the Hebrew Bible.

The thesis here is that the Targums and the NT exegete Scripture messianically.⁶ That is, they both tend to “disambiguate” messianic texts. The Targums most often do this through the use of the title “the Messiah” (משיח). The NT, on the other hand, is unique in its application of messianic texts to Jesus. These messianic readings are rooted in the text of the Hebrew Bible itself. The messianic link between the Targums and the NT is of special importance for biblical theology—a discipline that has historically been concerned among other things with the NT’s messianic use of Scripture.

The present article falls into three main sections. The first section provides a brief discussion of the dating of the Targums in order to expose any otherwise unstated assumptions about directionality in their relationship to the NT. The second section examines the synagogue tradition common both to the Targums and the NT. The third and final section works through specific examples of similar exegetical practice as applied to messianic texts. It is believed that this course of study deepens understanding not only of the Targums and the NT, but also of the composition of the Hebrew Bible.

II. DATING THE TARGUMS

Over against Gustaf Dalman and E. Y. Kutscher, Paul Kahle argued that *Targum Onkelos* (Pentateuch) had very little to do with the spoken Aramaic of first-century Palestine, being instead a literary production of Babylonia that was introduced to Palestine only in the medieval period.⁷ On the other hand, Kahle believed that *Targum Jonathan* (Prophets) contained old midrashic elements, even though it also received its known form in Babylonia.⁸ Of greater interest to Kahle, however, were what he thought to be representatives more or less of Palestinian Aramaic: Cairo Geniza fragments, the *Fragmentary Targum*, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, and *Targum Neofiti*—all Pentateuchal.⁹ The Kahle School has often been chided for speaking of a single Palestinian Targum instead of a multiplicity of Palestinian Targums, but Kahle himself admitted that the Palestinian Targum was never official or uniform: “there were always different texts in existence.”¹⁰ Due to its pre-Mishnaic features, Kahle held that the Palestinian Targum as represented

⁶ According to Josep Ribera, *Targum Jonathan* presents the prophet as a teacher of the Torah who announces the coming of the Messiah and the eschatological era (“Prophecy according to Targum Jonathan to the Prophets and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch,” trans. Fiona Ritchie in *Targum Studies*, vol. 1, *Textual and Contextual Studies in the Pentateuchal Targums* [ed. Paul V. M. Flesher; South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 55; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992] 66).

⁷ Paul Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza* (2d ed.; New York: Praeger, 1960) 191–95.

⁸ *Ibid.* 195–98.

⁹ *Ibid.* 200–208.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 202.

by *Targum Neofiti* was in circulation by the second century BC in essentially the same form as the manuscript discovered by Macho.¹¹ Kahle pulled no punches in his statement of the significance of this:

In the Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch we have in the main material coming from pre-Christian times which must be studied by everyone who wishes to understand the state of Judaism at the time of the birth of Christianity. And we possess this material in a language of which we can say that it is very similar to that spoken by the earliest Christians. It is material the importance of which can scarcely be exaggerated.¹²

Others were not so sure about Kahle's conclusions, although everyone appreciated the value of the new discoveries. Macho dated the text reproduced by the sixteenth-century copy of *Targum Neofiti*, which he found miscataloged in the Vatican library as *Targum Onkelos*, to only the second century AD—a date still too early for McNamara.¹³ Nevertheless, McNamara believed that the later additions and recensional emendations were “the exception and do not invalidate the arguments in favour of an early date for the bulk of the material.”¹⁴ For McNamara, this early date was maintained by the relationship of the Targums to the NT.

The Cairo Geniza fragments are also relatively late, dating to about the eighth or ninth century AD. According to Matthew Black, however, “the comparatively late date of the manuscripts has nothing to do with the date of the translation.”¹⁵ For example, the agreement between the Cairo Geniza fragments and *Targum Neofiti* on the *halakha* of Exod 22:5–6 over against the Jewish authorities demonstrates the preservation of a non-official reading over at least eight centuries.¹⁶ This is, of course, not unprecedented. The discovery of the second Isaiah scroll in Qumran Cave 1 illustrates a remarkable ability to preserve not only oral, but written tradition, since the manuscript essentially agrees with the medieval Masoretic tradition.¹⁷ Indeed, the discovery of Targums to Leviticus and Job at Qumran necessitates the consideration of not only oral, but written targumic renderings that are pre-Christian.

It might be asked at this point what criteria can be used to isolate pre-Christian renderings when dealing with late manuscripts. For the purposes of this article, the unlikely mass production of new messianic renderings in the wake of Jewish-Christian polemics is certainly relevant. This is not to say that the Jewish community abandoned its messianic hopes after the first century. It is only to say that there is considerable evidence for a Jewish

¹¹ *Ibid.* 207–8.

¹² *Ibid.* 208.

¹³ Martin McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (AnBib 27; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1966) 45.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 65–66.

¹⁵ Black, *An Aramaic Approach* 22–23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 38–39.

¹⁷ Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament* (2d ed.; trans. Erroll F. Rhodes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 14.

consolidation against a messianic Tanak as employed by the Christians.¹⁸ The present paper is primarily interested in adducing parallels between the Targums and the NT. Whether or not there is dependence between the two on a given messianic rendering, the fact remains that a messianic theology of the Hebrew Scriptures is shared by two markedly different sources.

In conclusion, one of the most balanced approaches to the dating of the Targums has been provided by A. D. York.¹⁹ Against Kahle, York argues that anti-Mishnaic does not necessarily mean pre-Mishnaic.²⁰ Moreover, York points out that *Targum Neofiti*, *Targum Onkelos*, and *Targum Jonathan* all have messianic renderings (e.g. Num 24:17; Mic 5:1); so why is *Targum Neofiti* alone considered early on this basis?²¹ Why not speak of a proto-Palestinian Targum and a proto-*Onkelos*?²² There is no need to dichotomize the Palestinian and Babylonian traditions. Both contain old material and evidence of early written Targums.²³ Stephen Kaufman has built on York's work to say that "the language of the Palestinian Targum [though no earlier than the third century AD] is still our best guide to the spoken dialect of first century Galilee" (the literary language reflects an earlier colloquial language, contra McNamara who argued that the Palestinian Targum was colloquial itself).²⁴ For Kaufman, the best picture of written Aramaic antecedents of the NT can be gained from the literary dialects of Qumran and *Onkelos-Jonathan*.²⁵ Thus, even though most of the known Targums in their final forms are later than the first century AD, many of them have something to say about the exegesis and Aramaic of pre-Christian times.

III. THE SYNAGOGUE TRADITION

The early church shared the synagogue tradition of the centrality of Scripture exposition in public worship (e.g. 1 Tim 4:13).²⁶ This tradition can be traced at least as far back as Neh 8:8 where it is said that the book, the Torah of God, was read "clearly" (מִפְרֹשׁ). The reading was then accompanied by a "giving of insight" (שִׁים שְׂכָל) and understanding (וַיִּבְיֵנוּ בַמִּקְרָא). In this case, the reading was not followed by translation, but by interpretation. The types of interpretations that were later worked into the Aramaic translations have

¹⁸ See John H. Sailhamer, "Biblical Theology and the Composition of the Hebrew Bible," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002) 25–37.

¹⁹ A. D. York, "The Dating of Targumic Literature," *JSJ* 5 (1974) 49–62.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 52–53.

²¹ *Ibid.* 55.

²² *Ibid.* 56.

²³ *Ibid.* 60–61.

²⁴ Stephen A. Kaufman, "On Methodology in the Study of the Targums and their Chronology," *JSNT* 23 (1985) 123.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ David S. Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority, and Interpretation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995) 152–54.

been well documented,²⁷ but *derashic* techniques can also be located in the composition of the Bible itself.²⁸ For example, the relationship between the 318 men of Gen 14:14 and the man Eliezer in Gen 15:2 is forged by *gematria* (Eliezer = 318). The identification of Sheshak with Babylon in Jer 51:41 is made known through *atbash*, and so on.

As for the Targums themselves, there is some debate over the reason for the use of Aramaic. A common view is that Hebrew was no longer spoken, necessitating a translation in the vernacular of the people. Others, such as James Barr, have contended that some form of Hebrew was still spoken when the targumic tradition began.²⁹ According to C. Rabin, the rabbinic literature never limits the reading of Aramaic to those who do not know Hebrew, as it does with the reading of Greek.³⁰ Rabin believes there is another explanation for the Aramaic:

In the synagogue, explanations had to be brief and clear, and closely linked to each verse; they also had to be complete, as no dialogue between teacher and taught was possible. A paraphrase into Hebrew was impossible, because the uninstructed could easily take the paraphrase as part of the sacred text. The difference between mixed language and pure biblical Hebrew was hardly such that it would assure the clear distinction, at speaking speed, between the two kinds of text. It was therefore an almost ideal way out of the difficulty to provide the explanations in a literary language, transitional Aramaic, which was no doubt widely understood, resembling both spoken mishnaic Hebrew and spoken Aramaic, but almost word for word clearly set off from its Hebrew equivalents.³¹

The transposed Hebrew words, Hebraisms, and midrashic expansions within the Targums all presuppose knowledge of the Hebrew original.³² Therefore, a Targum has more value as an ancient commentary on the Hebrew text—"a guide to the correct understanding of a Hebrew text for those who already understood the words"—than as a translation.³³ Rabin has not been alone with this perspective,³⁴ yet he is confronted with at least

²⁷ See Philip S. Alexander, "Jewish Aramaic Translations of Hebrew Scriptures," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, vol. 1 (ed. M. J. Mulder; CRINT 2; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 225–28.

²⁸ See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

²⁹ James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968; reprint with additions and corrections, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987) 38–43.

³⁰ C. Rabin, "Hebrew and Aramaic in the First Century," in *The Jewish People in the First Century*, vol. 2 (ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern; CRINT 1; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 1030.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.* 1031–32.

³³ *Ibid.* 1032. "The fact that its language differed greatly from the spoken Aramaic of those whom it served, that it was artificial and bristled with semantic difficulties, did therefore not matter" (*ibid.*).

³⁴ E.g. Ernest G. Clarke, "Jacob's Dream at Bethel as Interpreted in the Targums and the New Testament," *SR* 4 (1974–75) 369; Michael G. Steinhauser, "The Targums and the New Testament," *TJT* 2 (1986) 264.

one difficulty: the explanation of the Scripture reading was already set apart by the fact that it was given by someone other than the reader—a *meturgeman*. Furthermore, the *meturgeman* was not allowed to read the explanation from a written text, making the separation from the canonical text even more evident.³⁵ Thus, the change from Hebrew to Aramaic would have only enhanced an already clear distinction, if in fact this was the purpose for the Aramaic. Nevertheless, Rabin's view on the whole is most probably correct. It is certainly difficult to disprove the existence of spoken Hebrew in the post-exilic period. Moreover, the fact that the Targums go well beyond mere translation is recognized by all.³⁶ In this regard, the Targums have much in common with the NT. The NT authors are much more interested in the explanation of Scripture than they are in word-for-word translation or "text-critical" establishment of the original text.³⁷

The synagogue and the targumic tradition helped to solidify the shift from temple to text in the post-exilic Jewish community. By the first-century AD, the average Jew was more familiar with rabbinic teachings and targumic renderings than with apocalyptic literature or the sectarian literature of Qumran.³⁸ The synagogue made the Targums part of the Jews' weekly life. In Acts 15:21 it is said, "Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath" (NASB). The Targums were perhaps in a position to influence the NT authors more than any other literature. It has even been suggested that the Syriac Peshitta was originally a kind of Targum for Jews that was later taken over by the Christian Church.³⁹

The NT itself contains a number of accounts connected to a synagogue. Luke's unique and programmatic account of Jesus' reading of Isaiah 61 is among these (Luke 4:16–30). The passage does not indicate whether or not Jesus was prompted, it only says that he "stood up to read" (Luke 4:16). An Isaiah scroll was handed to him, and Jesus himself found his text (Luke 4:17). Presumably a reading from the Pentateuch preceded Jesus' reading. Regardless, Jesus' own reading met the requirements for reading the Prophets to an interpreter:

He who reads in the Law may not read less than three verses. He may not read to the interpreter more than one verse at a time, or, in the Prophets, not more than three verses. But if these three are three separate paragraphs, he must

³⁵ E. Lévine, "The Biography of the Aramaic Bible," ZAW 94 (1982) 374.

³⁶ "The Targums, like LXX, followed the Hebrew text verse by verse, but they incorporated in the representation of the text a great deal of explanation and interpretation. Thus the text and its interpretation were woven together, and the interpretation often extended and amplified the text greatly" (John Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature: An Introduction to Jewish Interpretations of Scripture* [London: Cambridge University Press, 1969] 8).

³⁷ Contra those who view the quotations in the NT as the text-critical work of the Holy Spirit, the textual critic *par excellence*; the presence of different citations of the same verse is enough to dispel this view (e.g. Rom 1:17; Gal 3:6; Heb 10:38).

³⁸ Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament, Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible: A Light on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 19.

³⁹ Kahle, *The Cairo Geniza* 266, 272–73.

read them out one by one. They may leave out verses in the Prophets, but not in the Law.⁴⁰

The *meturgeman* is never mentioned in Luke's account, yet the insertion of Isa 58:6 in Luke 4:18 (Isa 61:1) would not have been the prerogative of the reader. It is possible that Luke himself has become the Targumist at this point. Moreover, it is easy to see why the *meturgeman* never had a chance to interpret Jesus' reading. Jesus closed the scroll, returned it to the helper (ὀπηρέτης), and sat down (Luke 4:20). Then he said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). It is interesting that Jesus refers to himself as an unwelcome prophet in Luke 4:24. *Targum Jonathan* begins Isa 61:1 in the following way: "The prophet says, 'The spirit of prophecy from before the LORD God is upon me.'" Apparently it was this self-designation that drove the entire scene from the synagogue to the cliff (Luke 4:29).

Another synagogue scene worthy of mention is found in Acts 13:13–41. Paul and Barnabas enter a synagogue at Pisidian Antioch on a Sabbath day (Acts 13:14). After the reading of both the Law and the Prophets (cf. Luke 4:17), Paul and Barnabas, not the *meturgeman*, are invited to offer a "word of exhortation" (Acts 13:15; cf. Heb 13:22). Paul's subsequent sermon is reminiscent of Stephen's speech in Acts 7:2–53, and both are reminiscent of Neh 9:5–37—a passage that also follows a reading of the Law (Neh 8:8). All three of these texts provide targumic interpretations of what is largely a Pentateuchal history. They all apply Scripture to the current situation (Neh 9:32–37; Acts 7:51–53; 13:38–41).

IV. EXAMPLES OF EXEGESIS

1. *Genesis 1:1*. *Targum Neofiti* reads, מלקדמין בחכמה ברא דיי שכלל ית שמיא ("In the beginning, with wisdom, the Son of Yahweh created the heavens and the earth"). The Targum is not alone in its indication of wisdom as the means by which God created. Jeremiah 10:12; 51:15 says that he established the world (חבל) by his wisdom (בחכמתו). In Ps 104:24 the psalmist says, "How great are your works, O LORD! All of them you have made with wisdom (בחכמה)." Proverbs 8:22–31 says that wisdom was at the LORD's side as a "master-workman" (אמון) when the heavens were established.

The Targum also finds support within the book of Proverbs for its understanding of the Son's role in creation. Proverbs 30:4 reveals that the one who established all the ends of the earth has a Son. It is difficult to say what the relationship of the Targum to Prov 30:4 is, but what does seem certain is that the Targum is engaged in a fascinating exegesis of ברא. In the Hebrew text of Gen 1:1, ברא clearly means "he created." But in Aramaic ברא can also be בר ("son") plus the suffixed definite article א ("the"). The Targum features this Aramaic option and adds שכלל for "he created" (or "he finished/decorated").

⁴⁰ *Mishnah Megillah* 4:4.

NT Christology picks up the thread of the above mentioned texts. For instance, 1 Cor 1:30 says Christ “became to us wisdom from God.” 1 Corinthians 8:6 speaks of Christ as the one “by whom are all things.” Colossians 1:15 calls the Son of God (Col 1:13) “the firstborn of all creation.” Just as wisdom in Prov 8:22 says, “The LORD created me רִאשִׁית,” so Col 1:18 refers to the Son as “the beginning.” Hebrews 1:2 says that God made the world through a Son.

But perhaps more than any of these NT texts it is the opening of John’s prologue that best passes as an actual reference to Gen 1:1.⁴¹ John 1:1 signals this with the phrase ἐν ἀρχῇ (“in the beginning”). The phrase is repeated in John 1:2 where the Word is again said to have been with God in the beginning (cf. Prov 8:22–31). McNamara has conducted a study of the conceptual influence of the Targums on John’s prologue with particular regard to the way the Targums use the terms “Word” (*Memra*), “Dwelling” (*Shekinta*), and “Glory” (*Yeqara*) as substitutes for “the LORD.”⁴² McNamara comments:

Present-day scholars tend to reject the targumic *Memra* as a background to, or contributing factor towards, John’s doctrine of the *Logos*. This they prefer to see prepared in the prophetic word (*dabar*) and in the Wisdom literature. This neglect of targumic evidence is unfortunate. Granted that the *Memra* of God and the Lord is but another way of saying ‘God’ or ‘the Lord’, it by no means follows that John was not influenced by targumic usage in his choice of *Logos* as a designation for Christ. For John, too, “the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). John got his doctrine on the nature of the *Logos* from the New Testament revelation. The question at issue for us is the sources from which he drew the concepts and terms in which he expressed it.⁴³

For John, the Word is also the Son of God (John 1:14; 3:16). Thus, both *Targum Neofiti* of Gen 1:1 and John 1:1–3 identify the Son as the agent of creation in Gen 1:1.

2. *Genesis 3:15*. The *Fragmentary Targum*, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, and *Targum Neofiti* all cast Gen 3:15 as an opposition between the descendants of the woman and the descendants of the serpent, in which the woman’s descendants strike the serpent’s head in keeping the commandments of the law, and in which failure to keep the commandments is identified with the woman’s descendants being bit in the heel.⁴⁴ There is no cure for the serpent, but there is a cure for the heel “in the day of King Messiah” (בְּיוֹם מַלְכָא מְשִׁיחָא). It is noteworthy that this Palestinian tradition does not identify the seed as an individual in accordance with the Hebrew Bible (Gen 12:1–7; 27:29; 49:8; Num 24:9). Nevertheless, it does read Gen 3:15 messianically.

⁴¹ See Peder Borgen, “Observations on the Targumic Character of the Prologue of John,” *NTS* 16 (1969–70) 288–95.

⁴² McNamara, *Targum and Testament* 98–106; all three terms occur together in John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory . . .”

⁴³ *Ibid.* 102–3; see also Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John’s Prologue* (JSNTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993).

⁴⁴ McNamara sees a parallel here with Rev 12:17 (*The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum* 221–22).

The Hebrew text of Gen 3:15 employs the verb שרף (“to bruise”), which only occurs in two other passages (Ps 139:11; Job 9:17). The verb שרף is more common in Aramaic in either the sense “to blow” or the sense “to rub off.”⁴⁵ It is no surprise, then, that the Targums find another word, but it is remarkable that the word chosen does not mean “to bruise.” It is rather מר (to strike”). The source of this choice is not difficult to trace. The ancient poem of Gen 3:14–19 shares a common theme with other relatively ancient poems in the Hebrew Bible—that of striking the head of the enemy. Numbers 24:17 says that the star from Jacob, the scepter from Israel, will strike (מך) the forehead of Moab. Judges 5:26 says that Jael smashed the head of Sisera; she struck (מך) and pierced the temple of his head. Habakkuk 3:13 says that the LORD goes out for the salvation of his people with his Messiah and strikes (מך) the head of the house of the wicked. In Ps 68:22 (Eng. v. 21), God strikes (מך) the head of his enemies (cf. Ps 110:6).

Paul picks up this theme in Rom 16:20 where he says, “The God of peace will crush (συντρίβω) Satan under your feet with haste.” According to Hatch and Redpath, the verb συντρίβω never translates מך in the Septuagint. Nevertheless, Paul’s allusion to Gen 3:15 is unmistakable. The ending of Romans is riddled with textual difficulties, but the evidence appears to favor the inclusion of “The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you” in Rom 16:20. This comes across as somewhat of a premature conclusion to the epistle, but it fits well with the targumic understanding of Gen 3:15. Both Paul and the Palestinian Targum tradition associate the defeat of the enemy and the deliverance of God’s people with the time of the Messiah. For Paul, the Messiah is none other than the Lord Jesus.

3. *Genesis 49:1, 8–12.* McNamara has drawn attention to two passages of the Palestinian Targum tradition (Gen 49:1; Num 24:3, 15) in which it is said that something about the Messiah has been withheld.⁴⁶ *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* indicates that “the definite time of the future in which King Messiah is to come (קיצא דעתיד מלכא משיחא למיתוי) was hidden from him [Jacob].” This perspective on the time of the Messiah is shared by 1 Pet 1:10–11: “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (NKJV). The Palestinian Targums of Num 24:3, 15 seem to be saying that the vision of the Messiah in Num 24:17 was given to Balaam, but not to the prophets. Likewise, Jesus says that many prophets and righteous men desired to see and hear what was happening in his time, but did not (Matt 13:17; Luke 10:24).

⁴⁵ Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica, 1903) 1538–39.

⁴⁶ McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum* 242–45.

Genesis 49:10 has the enigmatic phrase עַד כִּי יבֹא שִׁילָה. If שִׁילָה is understood as a proper noun, then it is, “until Shiloh comes.” If שִׁילָה is understood as the relative particle (ש) plus preposition and pronoun (לָה), then it is, “until the one to whom it belongs comes.” *Targum Onkelos* removes the ambiguity and renders, “until the Messiah to whom the kingdom belongs comes.”⁴⁷ The imagery of this passage—specifically Gen 49:11—is picked up later in Isa 63:2 and again in Rev 19:13, 15. John says that the individual is called “the Word of God” (Rev 19:13), “the King of kings,” and “the Lord of lords” (Rev 19:16).

4. *Numbers 24:17*. Numbers 24 contains a number of links to Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, not the least of which are the phrase “at the end of the days” (בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים) and the expression “he [the king] lies down like a lion, and like a lioness who will arouse him” (Gen 49:1, 9; Num 24:9, 14; Deut 31:29; 33:20).⁴⁸ The Hebrew text of Num 24:17b can be translated, “A star treads from Jacob,⁴⁹ and a scepter rises from Israel;⁵⁰ and he strikes the forehead of Moab, and he tears down all the sons of Sheth.”⁵¹ *Targum Onkelos* removes any ambiguity occasioned by the mention of a star from Jacob: “The King will rise from Jacob, and the Messiah will be exalted from Israel; and he will slay the nobles of Moab, and he will rule over all the children of humanity.” It has been suggested that the replacement of “Sheth” with “the children of humanity” (בְּנֵי אָנוּשׁ) is dependent on Gen 4:25–26 where Sheth’s son is called אָנוּשׁ (Enosh or “human”). *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* reads, “A mighty King will rule from the house of Jacob, and the Messiah will be exalted, a mighty scepter from Israel; and he will slay the nobles of the Moabites, and he will empty all the children of Sheth”⁵²

In Matt 2:2, the wise men ask, “Where is the one born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and we have come to worship him” (author’s translation). The account comes in the midst of Matthew’s barrage of fulfillment quotations by means of which he demonstrates that Jesus is the Messiah of the Scriptures. The star is unique to Matthew, and he directly associates it with the King of the Jews, just as the Targums substitute “King” for “star” in Num 24:17. *Testimonia* from Cave 4 (4Q175), which was current in Matthew’s day, brings Num 24:15–17 together with Deut 5:28–29; 18:18–19; 33:8–11; and Josh 6:26.

⁴⁷ The Palestinian tradition has, “until the time of King Messiah to whom the kingdom belongs comes.”

⁴⁸ See John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 35–37.

⁴⁹ The Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate all have, “A star shines from Jacob.”

⁵⁰ Cf. Gen 49:10.

⁵¹ On the basis of the Samaritan Pentateuch and Jer 48:45, it has been suggested that קָרַקַר (“he tears down”) should be read קָרַקַר (“crown of head”).

⁵² The verb behind “he will empty” (יִרְוֶקֶן) is graphically related to the verb behind “he tears down” (קָרַקַר); *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* goes on to speak of Gog (cf. Num 24:7; Ezek 38:2) and the corpses that will fall before the Messiah in the future.

In Rev 22:16, Jesus says, “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and progeny of David, the bright morning star” (author’s translation). Jesus’ identification of himself as “the root and progeny of David” harkens back to Isa 11:1, 10. He is the King of the targumic Num 24:17 and of Matt 2:2. Unlike Matt 2:2, however, Jesus does not simply *have* a star in Rev 22:16; he *is* the star. Earlier in Rev 2:26–28, Jesus promises to give the authority of Ps 2:8–9 and the morning star to the one who overcomes. Thus, messianic texts that are normally applied to Jesus are here applied to believers.⁵³ The Messiah will reign, but the saints will reign with him (Rev 5:10). This is the same picture of the future kingdom portrayed in Dan 7:14, 27. The Targums and the NT agree. The star of Num 24:17 is the King, the Messiah. The NT goes two steps further and applies the text to Jesus and his saints.

5. *Isaiah 52:13–53:12*. That the fourth servant song of Isaiah is applied to Jesus by the NT authors is certainly not news to anyone. But the individual, messianic interpretation of this text was often overshadowed in pre-Christian interpretation by a corporate/national understanding of the servant of the LORD. The one outstanding exception to this is the Targum of Isaiah. Donald Gowan comments:

In Judaism he [the Messiah] is not expected to suffer and die an atoning death, for atonement is made in other ways. One of these later texts is revealing enough to be worth noting; it is the Targum of Isaiah which, unlike earlier Jewish literature, does identify the Servant as the Messiah. But, having done so, it must then make drastic changes in the meaning of the text, for the Messiah does not suffer; he triumphs. In place of, “He was despised and rejected by men,” the Targum reads, “Then shall the glory of all the kingdoms be despised and come to an end,” and rather than being described as “like a lamb that is led to slaughter,” it is said of him: “The mighty ones of the peoples shall he deliver up like a lamb to the slaughter” (Isa 53:3, 7).⁵⁴

Whenever the Targum speaks of exaltation, the individual Messiah is in view (e.g. Isa 52:13). Whenever the Targum speaks of suffering, a nation is in view. For example, the disfigured appearance in Isa 52:14 is that of the house of Israel, not that of the Messiah. On the other hand, the appearance of the Messiah in Isa 53:2 is not that of an ordinary man, but a holy countenance. The individual servant who suffers as a substitute for the people (e.g. Isa 53:4–5, 11) is replaced by an individual who builds up the house of an afflicted, yet holy people.

What is remarkable about all of this is the tension sustained between the meaning of the Hebrew text and the prevailing messianic tradition. The

⁵³ The same phenomenon appears to occur with the use of Isa 42:6 in Acts 13:47.

⁵⁴ Donald E. Gowan, *Bridge between the Testaments: A Reappraisal of Judaism from the Exile to the Birth of Christianity* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1976) 501–2; the Messiah is also identified in the Targum of Isa 42:1.

Targumist could not avoid the fact that the Hebrew text spoke of an individual servant who would act on behalf of the people. But according to tradition this individual was not to suffer vicariously. Instead of choosing one over the other, the Targumist attempts to accommodate both.

Like the Targum of Isaiah, Jesus and the NT authors identify the servant of Isa 52:13–53:12 as an individual messianic figure. But unlike the Targum, the NT views this figure as a suffering servant. Quoting Isa 53:12 Jesus says, “For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, ‘AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS’; for that which refers to Me has *its* fulfillment” (Luke 22:37 NASB). Here Jesus interprets the servant of Isa 52:13–53:12 to be an individual, suffering servant; and he identifies himself as that servant. When Philip encounters the Ethiopian eunuch reading Isa 53:7–8 (Acts 8:27–39), he does not give the targumic interpretation that says the Messiah will deliver up the mighty ones of the peoples to be slaughtered like a lamb. No, he begins from this Scripture and proclaims Jesus to him (Acts 8:35).

There can be no doubt where Peter stood on the possibility of a suffering Messiah. Faced with the plain meaning of Isa 52:13–53:12, the reality of the cross, and the coming of the Spirit, Peter speaks of the sinlessness of Christ from Isa 53:9 (1 Pet 2:22) and of his death for “our sins” from Isa 53:5 (1 Pet 2:24). For Peter (unlike the Targum), the people are not merely afflicted victims. They are wandering sheep (Isa 53:6) in need of a shepherd (1 Pet 2:25). Thus, the NT and the Targum agree that Isa 52:13–53:12 speaks of an individual, but they do not agree that the passage speaks of a suffering individual.

6. *Micah 5:1*.⁵⁵ The Hebrew text of Mic 5:1 can be translated: “As for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the tribes of Judah, from you for me he will go out to be a ruler in Israel; and his goings forth are from aforetime, from days of antiquity.” The identity of the ruler is of immediate interest; namely, the subject of the verb “he will go out” (יצא). The ruler is said to be “from” Bethlehem, so the possibility of Bethlehem being in some sense a ruler over Israel is excluded. Although the ruler is further described in Mic 5:2–4a, there is no explicit referent given for him in the immediate context.

Targum Jonathan renders Mic 5:1 as follows: “As for you, Bethlehem Ephrath, you were too little to be numbered among the tribes of the house of Judah. From you before me the Messiah will go out to be a servant, a ruler (or ‘a servant of rulership’) over Israel, whose name has been spoken from the beginning, from days of antiquity.” Besides the insertion of “the Messiah,” there appears to be a reference to the servant of Isaiah and a reference to *Targum Neofiti’s* “from the beginning” (מלוקמין) of Gen 1:1. Is there any warrant for identifying the ruler here as the Messiah? One possibility is that the Targumist has taken “Bethlehem” as a link to Ruth 4:11 and

⁵⁵ The discussion follows the Hebrew versification; English versions have this verse as Mic 5:2.

the Davidic genealogy in Ruth 4:17–22. The author of Micah has already expressed interest in a coming king (Mic 2:12–13), an interest that is aligned with the hope of a Davidic king within the Book of the Twelve as a whole (Hos 3:4–5). Moreover, the language of Mic 5:2–4a is that of the Messiah and messianic kingdom found elsewhere. For example, the ruler’s reign is said to be “to the ends of the earth” (עַד אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ) in both Mic 5:3b and Zech 9:10b. Also, the association of “peace” (שְׁלוֹמִים) with the messianic kingdom is found in many passages such as Isa 9:5b (Eng. v. 6); Mic 5:4a; and Zech 9:10a.

Matthew 2:4–6 takes Mic 5:1 to be a prophecy about the birthplace of the Messiah. But Matthew’s text is very much different from the extant Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts of Mic 5:1. Matthew does not say that Bethlehem is “too little,” but that Bethlehem is “by no means the littlest/least” (οὐδαμῶς ἐλαχίστη). Matthew has thus removed the irony of the passage in order to focus on Bethlehem’s significance as the birthplace of the Messiah. Matthew has also forged a word play between “among the rulers of Judah” (ἐν τοῖς ἡγεμόσιν Ἰουδα) and “a ruler will go out” (ἐξελεύσεται ἡγούμενος). Finally, Matthew has moved the description of the ruler in Mic 5:3 to the position of Mic 5:1b in the form of 2 Sam 5:2; 1 Chr 11:2. However these textual issues are resolved, what is clear is that both *Targum Jonathan* and Matthew, two texts with very different purposes, have located the Messiah in Mic 5:1. In more ways than one, the text of Mic 5:1–4a has invited this messianic exegesis.

V. CONCLUSION

As stated in the introduction, the Targums and the NT exegete Scripture messianically. In other words, the Targums and the NT both have a biblical theology of the Messiah. It is highly unlikely that Judaism after the first century AD produced such a rash of messianic renderings that coincided with the very texts that formed the heart of Christian exegesis. Perhaps the NT authors were influenced in some way by targumic renderings, but some measure of independence has to be allowed. The solution probably lies somewhere between these two options. In any case, the exegetical work of these separate corpora highlights the messianic theology of the Hebrew Bible itself.

It is difficult to overstate the significance of the synagogue tradition shared by the Targums and the early church. The post-exilic Jewish community and the early Christian community were characterized by gatherings around the teaching of Scripture (Acts 2:42) during which messianic theology was expounded. This is not to say, of course, that there is no difference between the Targums and the NT. It is equally difficult to overstate the significance of the NT’s application of messianic texts to Jesus. This is clearly where the Targums and the NT part ways. Nevertheless, the Targums are in a position to inform scholars not only text-critically, but also in regard to the history of interpretation preceding the NT.

The examples of exegesis in this article have only scratched the surface. Much work remains to be done not only in the Law and the Prophets, but

also in the Writings—particularly the Psalms.⁵⁶ The Targums to the Writings have not been addressed here due to their relatively late and expansive character, but this is not to deny their value for future research.

⁵⁶ See the preliminary research in S. H. Levey, *The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation, The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum* (Monographs of the Hebrew Union College 2; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1974) 104–41.