

Atonement in 1st Peter – Reflections on Isaiah 53

The epistle of 1st Peter offers a unique perspective on the understanding of Jesus' death and its significance. The writer's integration of material from the Fourth Servant Song of Isaiah (52:13- 53:12) provides one of the few places in the New Testament where materials from this prophecy are applied Christologically to explain the death of the Messiah.¹ According to Karen Jobes "the most striking contribution to Christology is Peter's identification of Jesus with the Suffering Servant of Isa.52:13-53:12."² In this paper we seek to discern what the author says about the significance of the death of Jesus, specifically through his use of these texts from Isaiah. As well, we will consider how the Greek translator of Isa. 52:13-53:12 defined the work of the Servant and whether 1st Peter's use of these texts supports the contention that the Greek translator of Isaiah "deliberately interpreted these oracles in ways that exclude the attribution of suffering to *Kurios*."³ Finally, we will seek to draw some conclusions pertinent to the discussion about atonement theology and its formulation as the author of 1st Peter understands it. If this writer is Peter the Apostle, then such formulation takes us as close as we can get to the church's earliest, post-resurrection understanding about the significance of Jesus' death.

1. The use of Isa. 52:13-53:12 in 1st Peter.⁴

In this first letter Peter⁵ declares that God, the Father, is the designer of human salvation. He is the one "according to whose foreknowing" (κατὰ πρόγνωσιν θεοῦ 1:2) the people in

¹ Specific quotations from Isa. 52:11-53:12 occur elsewhere in the New Testament, but these are not used to explain the significance of Jesus' death.

Mt. 8:17 quotes from Isa. 53:4 to explain Jesus' healing ministry.

Lk. 22:37 quotes from Isa.53:12 to explain why Jesus is crucified among evil people.

Acts 8:32-35 quotes from Isa. 53:7-8 and Philip explains to the Ethiopian Eunuch that the prophet is talking about Jesus, "proclaiming the good news to him about Jesus."

Rom. 15:21 quotes from Isa. 52:15 to explain his mission to the Gentiles.

Rom. 10:16 quotes from Isa. 53:1 (cf. 52:7) to explain why the Jewish people rejected Jesus as Messiah.

Jn. 12:38-43 the author quotes from Isa. 53:1 and Isa. 6:10 to explain why the Jewish people did not believe Jesus, even though the prophet Isaiah "saw his glory and spoke concerning him."

Although Mark 10:45 does not quote directly from Isa.53, many scholars consider that Jesus is alluding to this text when he states his intention to "give his life as a ransom for many." There exist other linkages with the Fourth Servant Song such as Acts 3:13 where in Peter's speech he says that God "has glorified his servant" (ἐδόξασεν τὸν παῖδα αὐτοῦ), which is reminiscent of Isa. 52:13

ὁ παῖς μου...δοξασθήσεται σφόδρα.

² Karen Jobes, *1 Peter. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 51.

³ E.Robert Ekblad, "God is not to Blame: The Servant's Atoning Suffering According to the LXX of Isaiah 53," in *Stricken by God*, edited by Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Abbotsford, BC: Fresh Wind Press, 2007), 180. Cf. E.Robert Ekblad, *Isaiah's Servant Poems According to the Septuagint. An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999).

⁴ O.Cullmann, *Peter – Disciple · Apostle · Martyr A Historical and Theological Study* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1962), 68-69 notes that only in Acts 3-4 does the New Testament describe Jesus as παῖς τοῦ θεοῦ "servant of God" and in both chapters Peter is the primary character. 3:13 (τὸν παῖδα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν); 3:26 (ἀναστήσας ὁ θεὸς τὸν παῖδα αὐτοῦ);4:27 (ἐπὶ τὸν ἅγιον παῖδά σου Ἰησοῦν ὃν ἔχρισας); 4:30 (διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ ἁγίου παιδός σου Ἰησοῦ). In one case David is referred with this expression (3:25 Δαυὶδ παιδός σου). He proposes that "it is probably not too bold to conclude from this fact that that the author thus preserves the clear memory that it was the apostle Peter who by preference designated Jesus as the 'Suffering Servant of God'." Cullmann continues to suggest that "the Christology of the apostle Peter, if we may dare to use this expression, was quite probably dominated by the concept of the *ebed Yahweh*."

various provinces in Asia Minor have become “chosen resident aliens” (ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις 1:1) and part of God’s household. Based upon his “great mercy he has given us new birth...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (πολὺ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς...δι’ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκ νεκρῶν, 1:3). Using passive verb forms with God as the assumed agent, Peter affirms that Jesus Christ “was chosen⁶ before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake” (προεγνωσμένου μὲν πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου φανερωθέντος δε ἐπ’ ἔσχάτου τῶν χρόνων δι’ ὑμᾶς, 1:20). Presumably by employing the cognate noun and verb in 1:2,20 Peter wants to emphasize that God deliberately sent Jesus Messiah in order to accomplish human salvation. The outcome desired is that “through him [Messiah] you believe in God” (τοὺς δι’ αὐτοῦ πιστοὺς εἰς θεὸν 1:21). God’s intent in all of this is that “in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (“ἵνα ἐν πᾶσιν δοξάζηται ὁ θεὸς διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ 4:11).

Five times in his letter Peter ascribes the calling of people into salvation to God’s initiative.⁷ When people, Jews or non-Jews, respond to God’s inviting command to move from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, from futility to purpose, from disobedience to obedience, they become participants in God’s “eternal glory in Messiah Jesus” (εἰς τὴν αἰώνιον αὐτοῦ δόξαν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ 5:10), some aspects of which they experience in this age. Life now proceeds “under God’s mighty hand” (ὑπὸ τὴν κραταιὰν τοῦ θεοῦ 5:6), a place and position of love, empowerment, protection and purpose.

This is Peter’s grand vision of the new reality that God has generated through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God, the Holy Spirit, had revealed some aspects of this plan through the Old Testament prophets (the sufferings of the Messiah and the glory that would follow 1:10-12), but now this same Holy Spirit, “sent from heaven” (ἀποσταλέντι ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ 1:12) is announcing the fulfillment of these things in Christ Jesus, “through those who have preached the gospel to you” (διὰ τῶν εὐαγγελισαμένων ὑμᾶς 1:12).

So God is in charge of all of these events, from start to finish. It is important to understand Peter’s perspective on this because all that he teaches within 1st Peter occurs in accordance with “the will of God” (τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ 2:15; 3:17; 4:2,19), even the suffering of believers for the sake of the Gospel. This includes the things that Jesus experienced during his trial and death, his sufferings.

The specific context in 1st Peter where the writer links the events of Jesus’ trial and death with Isaiah 52:13-52:12 is his paranesis to the household slaves (2:18ff). Peter incorporates Jesus’ response to suffering as the paradigm that should define their response to “unjust suffering” (πάσχων ἀδίκως 2:19). In a rhetorical flourish⁸ unmatched in the New Testament Peter declares that “even⁹ Messiah suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps”

⁵ Whether Peter wrote 1st Peter is disputed. I will use the name “Peter” to indicate the author, without at this point arguing the case for Petrine authorship.

⁶ The NIV rendering of προεγνωσμένου as “chosen” does not fully capture the linkage with the cognate noun used in 1:2 πρόγνωσιν which it renders as “chosen according to the foreknowledge”. NRSV renders the verb in 1:20 as “destined”, which captures the sense of chosen and appointed according to previous plan. NASB used “foreknown” at 1:20 to translate the participle.

⁷ 1:15; 2:9,21; 3:9; 5:10. Everyone who resides in “the household of God” does so because God specifically has called them.

⁸ An example of alliteration (παρήχησις). Cf. examples in the Greek Old Testament at Prov. 24:12; Isa. 1:21.

⁹ The NIV translation does not reflect the emphatic καὶ in the καὶ Χριστὸς construction in 2:21. NRSV and NASB render “Christ also”. Achtemeier argues that the καί is “related to the verb”, not specifically to the noun Χριστός. However, normally the emphatic καί precedes that lexeme it is modifying. Consider its occurrence in 2:5 καὶ αὐτὸς...οἰκοδομείσθε or 3:18 ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτίαν πάσχειν or 4:1 καὶ ὑμεῖς τὴν αὐτὴν ἔννοιαν ὀπλίσασθε. The author seems to employ it in contexts where he wants to emphasize the connection between the actions of the Messiah and the actions of believers. In 2:21 the

(καὶ Χριστὸς ἔπαθεν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ὑμῖν ὑπολιμπάνων ὑπογραμμὸν ἵνα ἐπακολουθήσητε οἷς ἵχνεσιν αὐτοῦ 2:21). The exact sense of the phrase “for you” (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν 2:21) has generated considerable debate. Leon Morris in an extended note on the meaning of ὑπὲρ in Galatians 3:13¹⁰ shows that this preposition can bear a substitutionary sense, supported by examples from contemporary papyri usage. He argues that “the substitutionary sense seems necessary in some passages”¹¹ and he includes 1 Cor. 15:29; Phm. 13; 2 Cor. 5:20 and Rom. 16:4. The Messiah’s suffering “for you” is not a suffering merely “for your benefit”, but the benefit arises because this suffering is done “in your place.” Peter never uses the preposition ὑπὲρ to describe something humans do “for God’s benefit”.¹²

Having established the paradigmatic nature of the Messiah’s example, Peter proceeds to unpack what this looks like behaviourally for these household slaves. As he does this, he weaves material from Isa. 52:13-53:12 into his pastoral teaching. This linkage occurs in the following passages.

1 Peter	Isaiah
2:22 Jesus’ trial	53:9
2:23 Jesus’ trial	Possible allusions to 53:7c-d; 53:6c,12; 53:8a.
2:24 Jesus’ crucifixion	53:4a, 12
2:24 Salvific implications	53:5d
2:25 Salvific implications	53:6

Peter in this hermeneutical tour de force emphasizes the following aspects of Jesus’ trial and death:

1. The Messiah was sinless. Despite tremendous provocation and injustice, Jesus continued to act in a sinless manner. No retaliatory or abusive language emerged from his lips. Peter emphasizes this by quoting from Isa. 53:9:

ὅς ἀμαρτίαν οὐκ ἐποίησεν οὐδὲ εὐρέθη δόλος ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ.

Greek Isaiah:

ὅτι ἀνομίαν οὐκ ἐποίησεν, οὐδὲ εὐρέθη δόλος ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ.

Peter used ἀμαρτία “sin” where Greek Isaiah reads ἀνομία “lawlessness”.¹³ Since Peter never uses ἀνομία to describe human transgression, but regularly employs ἀμαρτία, particularly

commonality seems to be that these household slaves are suffering unjustly and even the Messiah suffered in the same way. The household slaves are doing it because of their “consciousness of God” and the Messiah is doing it “for you”. While the suffering is common, the implications of the suffering are diverse, as Peter emphasizes in 3:18 where he notes the uniqueness of the Messiah’s suffering as ἅπαξ περὶ ἀμαρτίαν. For this reason I would argue against Achtemeier’s perspective that this comparison between the suffering of household slaves and the Messiah “obviates the need to find a reference to Christ’s death as well as his suffering in the verb ἔπαθεν, again something unnecessary in this context” (cf. Paul Achtemeier, *1 Peter. Hermeneia* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 199).

¹⁰ Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 62-64

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹² The only other context in which this preposition occurs is 3:18 in the expression δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, where the Messiah is the innocent one.

¹³ Note that the author does not mark this as a quotation and so may feel he can exercise some freedom with respect to the wording.

in the context of 1 Peter 2:21ff, Peter probably has made this change to create stylistic consistency within his text and not because he had access to a different Greek Isaiah text.¹⁴ Further, in the Greek text of Isa. 52:13-53:12 the noun ἁμαρτία occurs several times. Peter notes particularly that Jesus does not transgress through verbal discourse. He makes this point because for household slaves verbal retaliation or abuse was the primary mode they could employ to protest such ill treatment.

2. The Messiah trusts God to enforce justice and look after his case. In 1st Peter 2:23 the writer does not quote from Isa 52:13 -53:12, but there are various allusions. The reference to “the one who judges justly” (τῷ κρίνοντι δικαίως) picks up the note in Isa.53:6 that the Suffering Servant should have experienced ἡ κρίσις, but for some reason did not. This Greek noun could mean the act of judging, i.e. the role of judge, or the sentence given, or the trial process. However we understand the meaning of this noun, Isa.53:8b makes clear that the Suffering Servant dies, presumably as a result of his abortive trial. Greek Isaiah is silent as to who is executing the sentence. In Greek Isaiah the κρίσις seems to refer to human systems which should have been applied, but for some reason were not. In 1st Peter the writer indicates by his wording here that God is the “judge” and that the Messiah fully trusts God to exercise judgment in a completely righteous manner. Not only is the Messiah himself δίκαιος (innocent, righteous, just), but so is God who acts justly in every instance. Peter puts God in charge of this process ultimately and situates the Messiah within God’s justice process.

The verb παρεδίδου (imperfect verb form indicating that the Messiah “was continuously surrendering / entrusting himself”) also occurs in Greek Isa. 53:6,12. In both contexts, however, the Suffering Servant is the recipient of the action, not the agent.

Isa.53:6 καὶ κύριος παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἡμῶν

NETS and the Lord gave him over to our sins

Isa. 53:12 ἀνθ ὧν παρεδόθη εἰς θάνατον ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ

NETS because his soul was given over to death

καὶ διὰ τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν παρεδόθη

NETS and because of their sins he was given over

Yahweh is the specific agent responsible for “giving over” the servant in 53:6 and is the implied agent in the two passive structures used in 53:12. So while the verb is the same in 1st Peter and Greek Isaiah 53, the sense and subjects are quite different.

The Greek translation of Isa. 52:13-53:12 does not reveal directly how the Suffering Servant understood his relationship with Yahweh. However, the third Servant Song (Isa. 49:1-7) expresses the Servant’s knowledge that he is chosen by God, that God is faithful, and he will be honoured by God. Elsewhere in his letter Peter uses this kind of language to describe the Messiah (cf. 2:5 (chosen); 4:13 (the Messiah’s glory will be revealed)) and God (4:19 God is faithful).

Because the Messiah places his trust in God, there is no need for him to employ abusive or threatening language. Peter describes the response of the Messiah as “when they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate, when he suffered, he made no threats”

(λοιδορούμενος οὐκ ἀντιλοιδόρει πάσχων οὐκ ἠπειλεῖ 2:23). Jobes suggests that with this language Peter reflects the Servant’s determination to be silent, “as a lamb is silent before the one shearing it, so he does not open his mouth”

(ὡς ἀμνὸς ἐναντίον τοῦ κείροντος αὐτὸν ἄφωνος οὕτως οὐκ ἀνοίγει τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ Isa.53:7).

¹⁴ Achtemeier says that “the change adapts the passage more exactly to the present context with its reference to sin in 2:19, and the subsequent reference in 2:24 to Isa. 53:4, where ἁμαρτίας is used” (200). He also makes the observation in footnote that these terms were virtually synonymous in Greek Isaiah because of “the paralleling of ἁμαρτίας with ἀνομίας in 53:5, and the use of ἁμαρτίας in 53:4” (200, footnote 152).

3. The Messiah bears in his body humanity's sins "on the tree".

The death of the Messiah enters Peter's discussion here with reference to "the tree", i.e. the cross and the corporal punishment that the Messiah endures. Various terms in 2:24 also occur in Isa.53:

2:24

ὅς τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν αὐτὸς ἀνήνεγκεν ἐν τῷ σώματι αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον

NIV He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree

Isa. 53:4a οὗτος τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν φέρει καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν ὀδυνᾶται

NETS This one bears our sins and suffers pain for us.

53:11 καὶ τὰς ἀμαρτίας αὐτῶν αὐτὸς ἀνοίσει

NETS And he himself shall bear their sins

53:12 καὶ αὐτὸς ἀμαρτίας πολλῶν ἀνήνεγκε

NETS And he bore the sins of many.

The common element between 1st Peter 2:24 and Isa.53:4,11, 12 is the formula ἀναφέρειν (or φέρειν) τὰς ἀμαρτίας, "to bear the sins." This verb, when followed by the accusative, can signify "to bear the consequences of something." For example, in Num.14:33 Moses warns Israel that because of their rebellious murmuring their children "shall bear your fornication" (ἀνοίσουσιν τὴν πορνείαν ὑμῶν), i.e. they shall experience the consequences of their parents' sinful disregard for Yahweh.¹⁵ The Messiah bears the consequences of sins that he never committed. 1st Peter uses the first person plural (as found in Isa.53:4), including himself in this wonderful act that the Messiah does. Further, Peter maintains the emphatic pronoun αὐτός (himself) that Greek Isaiah uses in 53:11,12, perhaps to emphasize the dramatic and astonishing action of the Messiah. What Peter adds is the explicit reference to the crucifixion.¹⁶ Greek Isaiah also makes clear that the suffering of the servant is quite corporeal, resulting in wounds, sickness and finally death. What is clear in both Isaiah 53 and 1st Peter 2 is that the Messiah's (Suffering Servant's) substitutionary embrace of the consequences of sin committed by others results in terrible, undeserved suffering and death.

The consequences of the Messiah's death by crucifixion for those who accept salvation is that they "die to sins" and "live for righteousness" (1st Peter 2:24). Peter considers Isa.53:5 "by his bruise we were healed" (τῷ μώλωπι αὐτοῦ ἰάθημεν)¹⁷ to describe this radical change in spiritual orientation, quoting this clause at the end of v.24 (οὗ τῷ μώλωπι ἰάθητε), incorporating necessary syntactical adjustments. Again the note of substitution is unmistakable. The Messiah's "bruising" results in the salvific "healing" of Peter's audience. The vicarious nature of this activity is also apparent. Peter uses the aorist passive formation found also in Greek Isaiah. The agent who brings this healing is left implicit. However, the initial verses of this letter (1:1-3) indicate that it is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who collaboratively are responsible for this healing.

4. People are characterized as straying sheep.

¹⁵ Heb.9:28 reads "so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people"

(καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ προσενηχθὲς εἰς τὸ πολλῶν ἀνενεγκεῖν ἀμαρτίας). NRSV translates this text as "so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many..."

¹⁶ Jobes notes (p.197) how significant death by crucifixion would be for slaves, because this was the common method of slave execution in the Roman empire.

¹⁷ The translator of Isaiah does not indicate who is responsible for the bruising, but presumably it arises in the course of the Servant's suffering for the sins of other people.

As Peter concludes his interpretation and application of Isa. 52:13-53:12, he describes these believers in their pre-Christian state as “sheep going astray” (ὡς πρόβατα πλανώμενοι 2:25). Greek Isaiah characterizes Israel, speaking through the prophet, in these terms:

Isa. 53:6

πάντες ὡς πρόβατα ἐπλανήθημεν, ἄνθρωπος τῆ ὁδῷ
ὡς αὐτοῦ ἐπλανήθη

NETS All we like sheep have gone astray; a man has strayed in his own way.

This ‘straying’ is defined in Isa.53:6 as “our sins”. Peter regards this ‘straying’ similarly to describe sinful human behaviour responsible for the Messiah’s death. God’s intervention through the Messiah has given them opportunity to “return to the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls.” The characterization of God in these terms brings us back once more to Peter’s fundamental assertion that God is accomplishing his plan. Only the intervention by the Shepherd will result in the sheep’s rescue.¹⁸

Peter links the death of Jesus with Isa. 53 material once more in 3:18. Primarily the expression “the righteous (singular) for the unrighteous (plural)” (δικαιὸς ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων). In Greek Isa. 53:11 God desires “to justify a righteous one who serves many well” (δικαιῶσαι δίκαιον εὖ δουλεύοντα πολλοῖς).¹⁹ The designation of the Suffering Servant as “righteous, innocent or just” parallels the Messiah’s sinless behaviour. In the case of the Suffering Servant although he is suffering because of sins, they are not his. He is innocent. In the case of the Messiah this “innocence” makes him suitable as the “once for all sacrifice”.

The phrase περὶ ἁμαρτίων (“for sins” 1 Peter 3:18) often in the Greek translation of the Pentateuch means “sin-offering.” For example, among the many instructions Moses gives in Lev. 5 regarding appropriate sacrifices, several sacrifices are to be offered as “sin offerings.” In 5:7 Moses says that if a person cannot afford to sacrifice a sheep “for his sins” then he should bring “two young doves to the Lord, one for sin (περὶ ἁμαρτίας) and one for a whole burnt offering.” Similarly in 5:11 the poor can bring “one tenth of an ophi of fine flour for sin (περὶ ἁμαρτίας).” In both cases the NRSV translates the corresponding Hebrew text as “sin offering.” While it is possible that Peter in 3:18 simply means that the Messiah “suffered for sins,” his use of sacrificial terminology in 1:18-19 suggests that he means something more, namely that the Messiah suffered as a sin offering. The use of ἅπαξ (once for all) similarly would indicate that Peter is intending to say something more significant in 3:18.²⁰

The last section in 1st Peter we will discuss is the reference to redemption in 1:18-19. Peter exhorts the recipients of his letter to “live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.” The basis for his injunction lies in what they now know about God’s actions for their salvation.

1:18-19

οὐ φθαρτοῖς, ἀργυρίῳ ἢ χρυσίῳ, ἐλυτρώθητε ἐκ τῆς ματαίας ὑμῶν
ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαραδότου ἀλλὰ τιμίῳ αἵματι ὡς ἀμνοῦ ἁ-
ώμου καὶ ἀσπίλου Χριστοῦ

NIV it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect..

¹⁸ Jobes points out (p.198-199) that the sheep-shepherd motif also is found in Isa. 40:10-11 and Ezek. 34:11-13, where God says he “will oversee (ἐπισκεψομαι) them.”

¹⁹ NETS translates this section of 53:11 “to justify a righteous one who is well subject to many.” I think that the sense of “serve” is more appropriate to this context than the idea of “subject to”.

²⁰ The similar use of this adverb in Heb. 9:28 with reference to the sacrificial nature of the Messiah’s death certainly indicates that this connection was known within the early church.

Within these verses Peter incorporates several metaphors related to sacrificial ritual, but also with echoes of slave manumission. The references to “a lamb without blemish or defect” and “precious blood” clearly points to animal sacrifices required in the Old Testament for Israel’s maintenance of covenant relationship with God. When connected with the concept of redemption, the sacrificial language speaks of the cost of such liberty.

In the Old Testament the concept of redemption occurs first in connection with Israel’s escape from Egypt.²¹ In Greek Exodus 6:6 Yahweh promises Israel that “I will bring you out from the domination of the Egyptians and I will deliver you from slavery and I will redeem (λυτρώσομαι) you by a raised arm and a great judgment.” The context is plainly one of freedom from slavery. What is the ransom price that is paid for this redemption? The life of Pharaoh’s firstborn will be taken. This is the great judgment. Israel is protected from the effects of this judgment by God’s action to initiate Passover. The ‘price’ that an Israelite family pays for freedom from this judgment is the sacrifice of a “perfect sheep” (πρόβατον τέλειον Exod. 12:5). God also insists that Israel either sacrifice to God or ransom every firstborn male human and animal. A ransom given in exchange for the life of the person or animal will be a sheep (Exod.13:13).²² It is within these rituals that we need to situate the language Peter uses to explain the significance of the Messiah’s death.²³

We know from Peter’s discussion in 2:21-25 that the Messiah “bore our sins in his body on the tree.” When he uses this sacrificial language in 1:18-19 and links it with the idea of redemption, we have to ask what these statements reveal about Peter’s understanding of the work Jesus accomplished at the cross. I would summarize Peter’s framework as follows:

1. Peter construes the Messiah’s death as a sacrifice.
2. It is a sacrifice *περὶ ἁμαρτίας*, as a sin offering, but also with reference to the Passover sacrifice.
3. An act of redemption is required in order to enable people to escape from the slavery of sin (cf. the language of freedom used in 1:16).
4. The Messiah’s death is the ransom price that enables this freedom and deals with the judgment that God otherwise would exact from sinful human beings.
5. He is a suitable sacrifice because he is innocent and has no sin in himself, so he is “without blemish.”
6. He voluntarily takes upon himself the consequences of humanity’s sin, thereby emulating the action of the Suffering Servant in Isa. 53.
7. This is a singular offering and nothing more is required to secure the righteousness of human beings.
8. All this happens under the orchestration of God, the Father, whose foreknowing has engaged the Messiah in this task “before the foundations of the earth.” There is no antagonism between the Father and the Son about these matters. The Son is perfectly in agreement with the Father on these matters. So his death is not a coercive or abusive act, but a voluntary offering of himself, with full trust in God’s perfect justice.

²¹ 1st Peter is linked in various ways with the Exodus story. In particular the reference to “God’s mighty hand” in 5:7 reminds readers of God’s tangible actions to deliver Israel from Egypt and preserve this people in the wilderness.

²² “If you do not exchange it, you shall redeem it. Every firstborn of a human being among your sons you shall redeem” (NETS translation of Exod. 13:13). The Greek reads: *ἐὰν δε μὴ ἀλλάξης, λυτρώση αὐτὸ. πᾶν πρωτότοκον ἀνθρώπου τῶν υἱῶν σου λυτρώση.* In his great song celebrating Israel’s escape and Egypt’s destruction, Moses praises God because “You led by your righteousness this people of yours whom you redeemed” (Exod. 15:13 NETS translation of the Greek text).

²³ This language of redemption also occurs in Greek Isaiah 52:3.

What is left undefined by Peter is to whom the ransom is paid. There is no doubt in Peter's mind that a ransom is paid and the Messiah pays it on behalf of those in whose place he offers his life. Regardless of how we construe the Greek translation of Isa. 52:13 – 53:12, Peter in his first epistle understands the Messiah's death to be voluntary, substitutionary, sacrificial, a ransom, and completely within the scope of God's specific and just plan. All components are necessary for people to experience the new birth in Christ and escape the just judgment of God.

One other phrase should be mentioned, namely λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, translated in the NIV as "a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9). The noun περιποίησις defines something acquired and thus possessed. The Greek translation of Isaiah 43:21 describes Israel as λαόν μου, ὃν περιεποιήσαμην τὰς ἀρετάς μου διηγεῖσθαι ("my people whom I have acquired to set forth my excellencies" (NETS); "the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise" (NRSV rendering of the Hebrew text)). Malachi prophecies (3:17) that there will come a day when God "makes them my acquisition (εἰς περιποίησιν)."²⁴

The verb occurs in Paul's speech at Ephesus (Acts 20:28) where the church of God is defined as ἣν περιεποίησατο διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου ("which he bought with his own blood" (NIV). Peter's inclusion of the expression λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν integrates with his statements about the redemption of believers "with the precious blood... of the Messiah" (1:19). God either has or is in the process of "possessing" this people. This suggests that the price paid for this acquisition was the sacrificial death of the Messiah, as the Acts passage suggests.²⁵ The fact that the Messiah is described as "chosen, precious" (ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον 2:4,6) in God's eyes means that those associated with him likewise acquire special value in God's economy.

Peter does not define how this spiritual transaction occurs, i.e. how the payment flows, but he does seem to understand that the Messiah's death at the cross was payment in some form to some divine agent, which enables God to acquire a new people for himself.

2. The Relationship between Yahweh and the Suffering Servant in Isa. 52:13-53:12.

In their book *Invitation to the Septuagint* Jobes and Silva use the Fourth Servant Song in Greek Isaiah as text to demonstrate how the exegesis of a Septuagint text should proceed.²⁶ In the process of this discussion they note that in three separate cases the Greek translator of Isaiah seems to have blunted the sense of the Hebrew text when it says that Yahweh is responsible for "smiting the servant."

²⁴ The phrase λαὸς περιούσιος ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἔθνῶν ("a people special above all nations" (NETS)) occurs in Exodus 19:5 9 (cf. 23:22 Greek text where it occurs again, but there is no equivalent text in current Hebrew traditions). God promises that Israel will be "my special treasure (*segullah*) among all the peoples because I own the whole earth". In other Old Testament contexts this term (*segullah*) indicates something very valuable. In Ecclesiastes 2:8 the term describes "the treasure of kings", i.e. silver and gold. The author of Chronicles uses it to describe the wealth David collected to construct the temple (1 Chronicles 29:3). This term also occurs in Moses' instructions to Israel in Deuteronomy (7:6; 14:2; 26:18-19). The Psalmist affirms that Lord has chosen Israel as His "special possession" (135:4). In Malachi the prophet (3:16-18) reports that those who feared God wrote their names in "a book of remembrance" and God announces that they are His "own possession". Liddell and Scott state that λαὸς περιούσιος = λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν. Περιούσιος signifies something left over from abundance, profit, benefit; περιποίησις means a possession, something acquired.

²⁵ In Ephesians Paul says that believers "have redemption through his (Jesus Christ's) blood" (ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, 1:7) and that the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance "until the redemption of those who are God's possession" (εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιποιήσεως, 1:14). Again there is a linkage between the concept of possessing or acquiring a people, the process of redemption, and the blood of the Messiah as involved in this transaction.

²⁶ Karen Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 215-226.

Isa. 53:4d MT ואנחנו השבנהו בגוע מכח אלהים ומענה
NRSV yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.
LXX
καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐλογισάμεθα αὐτὸν εἶναι ἐν πόνῳ καὶ ἐν πληγῇ καὶ ἐν κ
ακώσει
NETS and we accounted him to be in trouble and calamity and ill-treatment.

Jobes and Silva comment:

This rendering is only one of several examples where the translator clearly avoids statements that attribute the servant's sufferings to God's actions.²⁷

Isa. 53:6 MT ויהוה הפגיע בן את עון כלנו
NRSV and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
LXX καὶ κύριος παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἡμῶν
NETS and the Lord gave him over to our sins.

Jobes and Silva suggest that:

...the strong Hebrew expression “the Lord has struck him with the iniquity of us all” is softened by means of the verb παραδίδωμι, a term that this translator uses at various times when he needs to get out of a difficulty (the force of the following dative construction, ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις is not clear).²⁸

Isa. 53:10 MT ויהוה חפץ דכאן החלי
NRSV Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain
LXX καὶ κύριος βούλεται καθάρισαι αὐτὸν τῆς πληγῆς
NETS and the Lord desires to cleanse him from his blow.

On this text they comment:

In verse 10a, the use of καθάρισαι αὐτόν to represent דכאן (Piel infinitive with pronominal suffix, “to strike him”) is another instance of the translator's concern to avoid attributing to God the action of mistreating the servant.²⁹

E.R. Ekblad has made similar observations and concluded that “the LXX translators' many differences with the MT of Isaiah 53:3-7 can be interpreted as theologically motivated. They seek to disassociate God from the servant's (Israel's) suffering in verses where the MT could be (wrongly I believe), and often has been, interpreted to support a notion of atonement through penal substitution.”³⁰

We have taken time to define Peter's understanding of the significance of Jesus' death and how he incorporated materials from Isa. 52:13-52:12 into his exposition. While Peter did not employ these Isaiah materials to identify God's involvement in the Messiah's sufferings, his entire presentation certainly places the Messiah within the scope of God's action and his suffering, death, resurrection and ascension occurs “under God's mighty hand.” This framework indicates that Peter associates God with the Messiah's sufferings and his use of the Fourth

²⁷ Ibid., 221.

²⁸ Ibid., 223.

²⁹ Ibid., 226.

³⁰ E.R. Ekblad, “God is Not To Blame,” 204. I am not sure why Ekblad uses the plural in reference to the translation of Isaiah. I am not aware of any evidence that suggests more than one person was responsible for the Isaiah translation. Care must also be taken to distinguish between how the translator intended his translation to be read and how in the course of transmission history it came to be understood. In this part of the paper we are interested in the first. In the initial part of the paper we consider how Greek Isaiah text was interpreted in its transmission history.

Servant Song to describe how the Messiah “bore our sins in his body on the tree” serves to show that Peter understands the servant’s suffering similarly, regardless of how the Greek translator of Isaiah may have intended the Isaiah text to be read.

Certainly there are differences between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint translation of Isa. 52:13-53:12. The Isaiah translator is well-known for his periphrastic renderings and his tendency to contemporize the text with respect to events of his day. However, discerning theological tendencies within his translation is another matter.

Plainly, as Jobes and Silva, as well as Ekblad, have demonstrated, the texts of 53:4,6,10 seem to indicate concern on the part of the translator regarding Yahweh’s involvement in the servant’s suffering. We will explore three elements in order to gain some traction on this question:

- a. does the Isaiah translator in other sections of Isaiah seek to disassociate Yahweh from Israel’s sufferings? If not, why would this be a specific “theological concern” for the translator in the case of the Fourth Servant Song, particularly if, as many understand, the servant is a collective representation of Israel?
- b. is the characterization of the translator’s strategy in Isa. 52:13-53:12 sustained by a review of the evidence or do alternative explanations negate this hypothesis?
- c. does the Isaiah translator alter all references to Yahweh’s association with the servant’s suffering in Isa. 52:13-53:12 and if not, then perhaps other explanations should be sought for these changes in 53:4,6,10.

With respect to the first question, let us look at two texts in Greek Isaiah. One of the most famous passages in Isaiah, one that Jesus himself adopts and uses, is the Song of the Vineyard in Isa.5. The theme is Yahweh’s disappointed expectations for Israel. The vineyard is Israel, the owner is Yahweh. When the vineyard does not bear the expected fruit, the vineyard owner decides to destroy it. The prophet, speaking for Yahweh, says:

LXX

ἀφελῶ τὸν φραγμὸν αὐτοῦ...καθελῶ τὸν τοῖχον αὐτοῦ...ἀνήσω τὸ
ν ἀμπελῶνά μου

NETS I will remove its hedge,...I will tear down its wall,...I will abandon my
vineyard.³¹

As this oracle continues the prophet announces:

LXX

καὶ ἐθυμώθη ὀργῇ κύριος σαβαωθ ἐπὶ τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐπέβαλε
τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ ἐπ’ αὐτούς καὶ ἐπάταξεν αὐτούς.

NETS And the Lord Sabaoth was enraged with anger against his people, and he laid his
hand on them and struck them.³²

Yahweh acts in judgment against his people and the destruction is significant. The resultant suffering, though deserved, was horrendous. The translator of Isaiah does not adopt any strategy to mitigate the force of these pronouncements by Yahweh. What is particularly noteworthy in this example is that statement that Yahweh “strikes” Israel. The Hebrew verb נָכַח (Hiphil imperfect waw-consecutive with pronominal suffix) is rendered by καὶ ἐπάταξεν αὐτούς. The Hophal participle of נָכַח occurs also in Isa. 53:4 in the phrase “struck down by God” which the translator rendered as ἐν πληγῇ. So the rendering in 53:4 does not necessarily occur because the translator generally in his translation desires to avoid the idea that Yahweh will strike Israel with judgment, because he translates similar Hebrew material in 5:25 without adjustment.

A second example occurs in the call narrative where Isaiah responds to Yahweh’s appointment as prophet (Isa.6). In response to Isaiah’s question concerning the duration of his mission, Yahweh answers:

³¹ Isa. 5:5-6.

³² Isa. 5:25

LXX

ἕως πότε, κύριε; καὶ εἶπεν Ἔως ἂν ἔρημωθῶσι πόλεις παρὰ τὸ μὴ κατοικεῖσθαι καὶ οἶκοι παρὰ τὸ μὴ εἶναι ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἡ γῆ καταλειφθήσεται ἔρημος. καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα μακρυνεῖ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους

NETS “How long, O Lord?” and he said: “Until cities become desolate, because they are not inhabited, and houses, because there are not people, and the land will be left desolate. And after these things God will send people far away.”³³

Again, we see that Yahweh is the one making this announcement, forecasting how his message of judgment against Israel will be completed. The Greek translator holds nothing back in his rendering.

I would conclude from these two contexts (and their number could be multiplied) that generally the Isaiah translator does not alter texts in which Yahweh brings judgment and punishment against Israel, actions that imply suffering and destruction. If this is true of the translation generally, then we must be cautious to assume that this was his intent in the alterations observed in the translation of Isa. 52:13-53:12, to which we turn now.

Secondly, let us review the proposed texts from Isa.53:4,6 and 10 in order to determine whether in fact the translator’s renderings do disassociate Yahweh from the servant’s suffering.

1. Isa. 53:4. It is true that the Greek text does not render האלהים in its translation. The materials from Qumran do not provide any evidence that the Greek translator had a different Hebrew text which also omitted mention of God in this context. So we have to assume that the translator made an adjustment in his rendering for some reason.

Further, we note that elsewhere the translator has no problem rendering the sense of the main verb (מכה) when Yahweh is said to “strike them” (5:25). As well, in this context the translator has created a string of prepositional phrases that define the way people evaluated the servant’s situation – he was “in trouble and in calamity and in ill-treatment.” Rhetorical interests may have led him to maintain the parallelism in the case of the middle term. Within the Jewish canon trouble, calamity and ill-treatment can be attributed to Yahweh or to intermediate agents whom Yahweh uses to achieve his ends. So the omission of האלהים from the Greek translation does not necessarily remove the association of Yahweh with these activities. Finally, we note that in the context, the following verse leads these observers to acknowledge that the servant’s sufferings were their fault but produce benefit for them. However, it is “the Lord” who “gave him over to (or perhaps ‘for’) our sins” (Isa. 53:6).

While the Greek translator has made a change, it is not necessarily due to a theological tendency. Stylistic considerations could be at work. Further, the context does seem to attribute to Yahweh the servant’s sufferings (v.6).

2. Isa. 53:6. The key issue in this text is the rendering of ויהיה הפגיע בו את עון as καὶ κύριος παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις. The Hebrew verb פגע occurs five times in Isaiah. The Qal form means to meet or encounter and this form is found in Isa. 47:3 and 64:4. In 64:4 the translator rendered the verb as συναντήσεται (he will meet), which shows the translator understands the meaning of the Hebrew verb. He rendered 47:3 as οὐκέτι μὴ παραδῶ ἀνθρώποις (I will no longer deliver you over to men), a rendering that is very similar to what we find in 53:6 (and 53:12). At Isa. 59:16 the prophet used the Hiphil form to define someone who intercedes and the Greek translator gives a good equivalent with the participle ὁ ἀντιληψόμενος (one who helped). I would conclude that the translator knows the meaning of this Hebrew verb in both the Qal and Hiphil forms.

The Hebrew idiom that occurs in Isa. 53:6 is only found here in the entire book of Isaiah (Hiphil + acc.rei + ב) to signify “cause something to light upon.” This is rendered in the NRSV as

³³ Isa. 6:11.

“the Lord has laid on him the iniquity.” We know from the rendering in 47:3 that the equivalence between נָשָׂא and παραδίδοναι has already been used. The Greek idiom was used for another Hebrew expression at 25:5 (ἀπο” ἀνθρώπων ἀσεβῶν, οἷς ἡμᾶς παρέδωκας) to describe how Yahweh delivered Israel over to the impious, presumably for judgment. So the Greek translator in creating this translation for 53:6 and using παραδίδοναι as the equivalent is not doing something new. In fact he used the same idiom as he employed previously in 47:3.

What does it mean in Greek “to deliver someone over to someone/something?” The idiom signifies that the subject is committing a person to another person or group for purposes of punishment or destruction. For example, in Josh. 2:14 Rahab used this idiom in her discourse with the Israelite spies: ὡς ἂν παραδῶ κύριος ὑμῖν τὴν πόλιν (whenever the Lord hands over to you the city). She is talking about the capture of Jericho by the Israelites. The Psalmist entreats Yahweh: μὴ παραδῶς τοῖς θηρίοις ψυχὴν ἐξομολογουμένην σοι (do not deliver a soul that acknowledges you to the wild animals 74(73):19). The Psalmist seeks deliverance from his enemies.

The Hebrew text in Isa. 53:6 describes Yahweh’s action to bring the consequences of the sins of others to bear upon the servant. The results presumably will mean that the servant then bears the punishment for these sins that was due to the sinners themselves. The Greek translation alters the sense, but in the end it is Yahweh, i.e. κύριος, who “hands over” the servant “to the sins”, i.e. to consequences that sinful activities normally create. The wording is different, but the result seems very little changed.

It should be noted that in Isa. 53:12 the translator twice used this Greek verb. Once he renders another form of נָשָׂא (final clause of v.12 usually rendered “he made intercession for the transgressors”). The Greek translator again used παραδίδοναι as the equivalent, creating the sense “because of their sins he was given over.” This reaffirms the repeated emphasis in the Fourth Servant Song that the servant’s life is surrendered because of the sins of the people and Yahweh is the agent.

3. Isa. 53:10. In this text the question is why the translator chose καὶ κύριος βούλεται καθαρίσαι αὐτὸν τῆς πληγῆς (and the Lord desires to cleanse him from his blow (or calamity)) to render the sense of the Hebrew text וַיְהִי כִּי יַחַד הָיָה לְיְהוָה (and Yahweh desired to crush him with pain). Jobes and Silva acknowledge that the translator probably read the Hebrew verb נָכַח as the equivalent of the Aramaic verb נָכַח which means “to cleanse.”³⁴ Whenever this verbal root occurred in his Hebrew text, the translator used a different rendering, contextualizing his translation.³⁵ It seems he has some awareness that it bears negative connotations. If he does not know the specific meaning of the Hebrew verb, then his strategy of using the meaning that a cognate Aramaic verb possesses should not be construed to signify that he is attempting to alter the meaning of his Hebrew text. Rather he is struggling to understand it and then translate with a reasonable equivalent.

The translator, regardless of how he construes the sense of this verbal form, attributes to Yahweh, as does the Hebrew text, responsibility for this action. Further, we are unclear as to the exact meaning of the resultant Greek, particularly the sense of the genitive τῆς πληγῆς. The corresponding Hebrew text indicates that the calamity was the means by which Yahweh intended to “crush” the servant. The Greek genitive could imply separation, i.e. to cleanse him from

³⁴ K. Jobes and M. Silva, *Invitation...*, 226.

³⁵ 3:15 ἀδικεῖτε; 19:10 ἐν ὀδύνη; 53:5 μεμαλάκισται; 53:10 καθαρίσαι; 57:15 (rendering is unclear, but seems to be included in the term ὀλιγοψύχοις).

calamity.³⁶ Alternatively, it might designate the means by which the cleansing occurs, an unusual, but possible sense.³⁷ This would give the sense “to cleanse him by the calamity.”

Ziegler in his edition of Greek Isaiah notes that the majority of manuscripts read ἄπὸ πληγῆς, which, if original, would settle the question of meaning to signify separation.³⁸ However, he does choose the reading τῆς πληγῆς as the original in his view, which leaves open the sense intended by the translator.

So with these various issues – textual uncertainty, dispute as to the meaning of the genitive, reading the Hebrew verbal root from the standpoint of an Aramaic cognate – it is very difficult to be sure what the translator’s strategy was in this text. To conclude that this reading represents “another instance of the translator’s concern to avoid attributing to God the action of mistreating the servant” goes beyond what the evidence will bear. It may be the case, but we cannot be sure.

The third question is whether other texts in Isa. 52:13-53:12 support the attribution of the servant’s suffering to Yahweh’s action. We will consider briefly two texts in Isa. 52:13-53:12 that do seem to support Yahweh’s involvement in the servant’s mistreatment. In 53:5 the translator tells us that “upon him was the discipline of our peace” (παιδεία εἰρήνης ἡμῶν ἐπ’ αὐτόν). The noun παιδεία signifies a discipline that incorporates an element of chastising or punishment. The genitive modifier suggests that this disciplinary chastising results in “peace”, the restoration of relationship between Israel and Yahweh. But who brings this disciplinary chastising to bear upon the servant? The following clause incorporates a passive verb (ἰάθημεν “we have been healed”) whose agent remains implicit. The last part of v.6 states clearly that it is Yahweh who gives the servant over to sins. The context would suggest that Yahweh is the only logical agent who can be responsible for the disciplinary chastisement that the servant experiences.

In 53:12 twice the Greek translation used the aorist passive form παρεδόθη. In the first case “the life [of the servant] was given over for execution”. In the second, “he was given over because of their sins.” Again, who is the agent implied in this action? In 53:6 Yahweh explicitly is named as the agent. I would suggest that these are cases of the divine passive, implying that Yahweh is the one ultimately responsible for this action.

Conclusions:

Millard Erickson argues that “the basic meaning of atonement” consists in the concepts of sacrifice, propitiation, substitution and reconciliation.³⁹ This he states is referred to commonly as “the penal-substitution theory of the atonement.”⁴⁰ In essence “Christ died to satisfy the justice of God’s nature. He rendered satisfaction to the Father so that we might be spared from the just desserts of our sins.”⁴¹

We have found in our review of 1 Peter that the author certainly describes the death of Jesus in sacrificial terms. The spilling of his blood becomes an explicit element in 1:18ff and the expression “bear our sins in his body” (2:24) echoes sacrificial terminology found in the Old

³⁶ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervans, 1996), 107-108.

³⁷ Ibid., 125. “The genitive substantive indicates the means or instrumentality by which the verbal action... is accomplished.” Herbert Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1973), 330-331 defines a “Genitive of Cause” used primarily with verbs of emotion. With such verbs the person stands in the accusative or dative and the cause is placed in the genitive case. Of course, καθαρίζω would not normally be construed as a verb of emotion.

³⁸ Joseph Ziegler, *Isaias. Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Göttingensis editum vol. XIV* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1967), 322.

³⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986 (unabridged, one-volume edition)), 811-815.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 815.

⁴¹ Ibid.

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Testament. Substitution is also clearly expressed because Jesus, who is without sin, takes upon himself our sins and his death occurs precisely because of this voluntary act of substitution (“by his bruise we have been healed” 2:24). In 3:18 the author describes the Messiah as “suffering once for sins, the just for the unjust.” Reconciliation is based upon the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is through the Messiah’s death that Jesus “leads us to God” and enables wandering sheep to return to their souls’ rightful Shepherd. While Peter does not employ the concept of “peace” very frequently, his dominant metaphor of God’s household implicitly defines a reconciled relationship between God and believers. Birth into this household occurs because Jesus has risen from the dead, demonstrating God’s immense mercy (1:3).

But what about the idea of propitiation? Does Peter incorporate this concept into his discussion about the reasons for the Messiah’s death? It is true that 1st Peter does not use terms such as wrath (ὀργή) or anger (θυμός). However, he does assume, in my opinion, the understanding of sacrifice expressed in the Old Testament (cf. Leviticus 4:35 for example), wherein the sacrifice for sin was required to appease God’s wrath and receive forgiveness. Peter does affirm that “God is holy.” Further, he is concerned that human beings enjoy the blessings made available through the Messiah’s death, including the opportunity to “live for righteousness” and avoid God’s just judgment. Certainly the writer understands that God will judge “the living and the dead” (as he did through the flood in Noah’s day). Satisfying God’s just demands then becomes a necessary element in gaining entrance into God’s household. Jesus becomes “a stone of stumbling and rock of offence” (2:8) for those who reject the Messiah as God’s means for human salvation. Without Jesus and his substitutionary death, there is no hope for mercy.

While this epistle may not be as explicit about some issues as Paul is in Romans or may not express things in exactly the same way as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, there are many areas of similarity and enough evidence to support the writer’s understanding that Jesus’ death was sacrificial, substitutionary, reconciling and propitiatory. He used Isa. 52:13-53:12 with clear reference to the death of Jesus, presumably because this was one of those prophetic texts (1:10-12) in the Jewish canon that bore witness to the sufferings and glory of the Messiah. If the Greek translator did theologically soften Yahweh’s involvement in the Servant’s suffering, the author of 1 Peter did not seem to interpret it this way.

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