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## **The Intricate Relationship Between Targum Jonathan and the New Testament Exemplified by “Targumic” Statements in Acts 13:21–22 and James 5:7–8**

**Abstract:** There are similarities between the way Targum Jonathan explains the Hebrew texts and the way the New Testament authors use the same texts. However, it is hard to identify the exact relationship between Targum Jonathan and the New Testament. Two examples of “Targumic” translations in the New Testament are explored in this article: Acts 13:21–22 and James 5:7–8. All in all, we can say that (1) it is hard to find identical forms of exegesis, although there are several similar cases and parallels; (2) we must do our best to describe similar cases as precise as possible, because there are both similarities and contradictions in all these cases; (3) there is no direct relationship between Targum Jonathan and the New Testament; but (4) they can be used cautiously as a means to better understand each other and (5) to better understand how Jewish authors – I include the New Testament Jewish followers of Jesus here – read and understood their Scriptures.

**Keywords:** Targum Jonathan, targums, Acts of the Apostles, Letter of James, Jewish exegesis

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### **1. Introduction**

**I**n the last decades, Targum studies have grown in several directions, from linguistic, historical and theological backgrounds to exegetical and text-critical applications. One element has always remained of interest for Christian Targum scholars, namely the relationship

between the Targums and the early Christian literature, including the New Testament writings.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between the Targums and the New Testament has always been a topic of discussion for several reasons. The first problem is, of course, the date of origin of the Targums. Although Aramaic translations of biblical books were found in Qumran, it only concerns an Aramaic Job (11QtgJob; 4QtgJob) and a small piece of an Aramaic Leviticus (4QtgLev = 4Q156). These manuscripts do not prove that complete translations such as Targum Onkelos, Targum Jonathan or a Palestinian Targum version of the Pentateuch existed prior to the writings of the New Testament. While Paul Kahle, in 1930, was of the opinion that at least the Palestinian Targums “preserved interpretations of the Hebrew Bible from the first century and before,”<sup>2</sup> later publications showed that there are no arguments that “supported the early nature of these Targums” in general.<sup>3</sup>

A second problem is the difference in genre between the Targums and the New Testament: The Targums are interpretative translations of the Hebrew Bible, while the New Testament contains several genres, all referring to the Old Testament, but neither of them interpreting or translating chapters in their context. A third problem is the difference in language: Parallels and contrasts must always be translated from Aramaic to Greek and vice versa.

The last problem I will mention here is the impossibility to pinpoint the exact source of a New Testament interpretation of Old Testament texts, since Targums are by no means the only Jewish sources of the first centuries. If a specific parallel between Targums and New Testament texts also appears in a midrash or in

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., the following monographs: Díaz, *Palestinian Targum and New Testament*; Díez Macho, *Targum y Nuevo Testamento*; Le Déaut, *Liturgie juive et Nouveau Testament*; McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum*; McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, revised in *Targum and Testament Revisited*; McNamara, *Targum and New Testament*; Chilton, *Targumic Approaches to the Gospels*. A new book on the relationship between Targums and the New Testament will be published in the Zondervan series Ancient Literature for New Testament Study, edited by Alan Avery-Peck and Bruce Chilton.

<sup>2</sup> Chilton – Flesher, *The Targums*, 151.

<sup>3</sup> Chilton – Flesher, *The Targums*, 152.

the Mishnah, what exactly was the source which the New Testament author used? And was it a written or an oral source that was used in both texts? Or, was there no source, only a common way or reading and interpreting texts?

In order to show these last kinds of difficulties in establishing the relationship between Targum Jonathan and two New Testament authors, I will discuss two New Testament texts that have parallels with Targum Samuel: Acts 13:21–22 and James 5:7–8.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. King Saul and King David in Acts 13:21–22

When Paul arrives in Antioch in Pisidia, he goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath and is invited by the officials to speak a word of exhortation (Acts 13:14–15). Paul then speaks about Jesus Christ, but not before he makes a small summary of Israel's history from the period in Egypt (v. 17) until the rise of King David (v. 22), introducing Jesus as “of this man's posterity” (v. 23, NRSV). In the verses about King Saul and King David, there are both parallels and contrasts with Targum Samuel:

<sup>21</sup> Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years.

<sup>22</sup> When he had removed him, he made David their king. In his testimony about him he said, “I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will do all my will.”<sup>5</sup>

### 2.1. Similarity with Targum Samuel

The Greek text of Paul's speech is an allusion to 1 Sam 13:14a, but he quotes neither the Hebrew text in translation nor a known Greek version. In the Hebrew text, God says that He has “searched” (בִּקַּשׁ)

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<sup>4</sup> Parts of the discussion on Acts 13 are also present in Van Staaldvine-Sulman, *The Targum of Samuel*, 299–305.

<sup>5</sup> Based on NRSV. The last phrase of the NRSV is adapted to the details of the Greek text (ποιήσει πάντα τὰ θελήματά μου, “he will do all my will”) in order to show the similarity with the Aramaic translation in Targum Samuel.

Piel), not *found*, an alternative for King Saul. The Greek version uses the verb ζητέω, “search (for), enquire.” The description of David as “a man after my heart” is a fairly literal translation of the Hebrew, but Paul adds an explanation of that expression that is not from the Hebrew text: “who will do all my will.” It does not appear in a known Greek version, but it is reminiscent of Targum 1 Sam 13:14a:

<sup>14</sup> But now your kingdom shall not be established. The Lord has established before Himself a man doing his will.<sup>6</sup>

Two elements from the Targum Samuel text stand out. First, it also avoids the word “search” in combination with its subject God. The God of Israel in Targum Jonathan does not “forget” (1 Sam 1:11)<sup>7</sup> and He does not “search.” God is an all-knowing God, and He is not capable of these typically human actions. Therefore, Targum Samuel replaces the Hebrew word by the same word used in the previous verse, יקן, “establish”. It could be that Paul in his speech follows the same theological path, avoiding the image of God searching for an alternative king. It could, however, also be that Paul and the *meturgeman* had Ps 89:21 in mind where God does not search either, but uses the verb מצא, “find.”

Second, Targum Samuel also explains the expression “a man after my heart” and does so parallel to Paul: “a man doing his [God’s] will.” The expression “a man after my heart” is regularly explained as an expression emphasizing “the free divine selection” in commentaries from Protestant backgrounds.<sup>8</sup> Yet, both Targum Samuel and Paul, in his speech, do not emphasize God’s free will in choosing, but David’s obedience to God’s will. He is a man after God’s will, i.e., a man doing God’s will.

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<sup>6</sup> My translation: Van Staalduine-Sulman, *The Targum of Samuel*, 304.

<sup>7</sup> Van Staalduine-Sulman, *The Targum of Samuel*, 126. See also Targum Jonathan translates Isa 49:14–15, where the verb “forget” is changed into “reject” in God’s case, but not in the human case (see Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum*, 97).

<sup>8</sup> McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 229. Cf. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, 346 (“the man of his choice”); Smelik, *1 Samuël 1*, 250 (“Hij heeft besloten”).

## 2.2. Difference from TgJ

Despite the abovementioned similarities between Paul's speech and Targum Samuel in the case of God appointing David as Saul's successor, there is a great discrepancy between Paul's description of Saul's reign as "forty years" and that of Targum Samuel in the first verse of 1 Sam 13:1. Paul's text again stems neither from the Hebrew Bible nor from a Greek version. The vast majority of the Greek manuscripts do not contain the first verse of 1 Sam 13 at all. The exceptions do not show the forty years of Paul's speech.<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew reads the impossible "Son of a year was Saul when he became king and two years he reigned over Israel." Hendrik Koorevaar rightly states that "two years are too short" if one considers the many actions during Saul's reign.<sup>10</sup> Targum Samuel does not care about such a consideration and translates the two numbers in accordance with the Hebrew text, but adds an explanatory note on the "one year":

<sup>1</sup> As a one-year-old child, in whom there is not guilt, was Saul, when he became king; and he reigned two years over Israel.<sup>11</sup>

So, where did Paul get his information on Saul's reign from? We do not know, but the same number 40 is also found in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* (*Ant.* 6.378).<sup>12</sup> Saul reigned, according to Josephus, "eighteen years during the lifetime of Samuel and for twenty-two years more after the latter's death."<sup>13</sup> Anyway, Paul did not use a targumic tradition in this case.

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<sup>9</sup> Koorevaar, "He Was a Year Son," 356–357 (referring to Barthélemy, *Critique textuelle*, 175): some give 30 years, others 31 (p. 357), while one minuscule translates the Hebrew text literally (p. 356).

<sup>10</sup> Koorevaar ("He Was a Year Son," 355) summarizes and categorizes all the solutions for this problem in his article, before giving his own solution.

<sup>11</sup> My translation: Van Staalduijn-Sulman, *The Targum of Samuel*, 299.

<sup>12</sup> For other traditions on Saul's reign, see Koorevaar, "He Was a Year Son"; Van Staalduijn-Sulman, *The Targum of Samuel*, 299–301.

<sup>13</sup> Thackeray, *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities Books V–VIII*, 357.

### 3. James 5:7–8

A second case of this intricate relationship between the New Testament and the interpretation in the targumic tradition is the metaphor of the farmer waiting for the rain to come. After warnings against several groups in the church, James arrives at his exhortation to be patient with one another, in chapter 5. In this chapter James uses the metaphor of the waiting farmer in verses 7 and 8:

<sup>7</sup> Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.

<sup>8</sup> You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

James encourages his addressees to be patient and to wait, like a farmer who has sown his land has to wait for the rains to come and for seeds to germinate. He cannot do anything in the meantime – it is out of his hands.<sup>14</sup> This same imagery is used in Targum Samuel, in the poetic version of King David's famous last words in 2 Sam 23. The “ruler over people,” who is “ruling in the fear of God” (23:3) is described by King David as follows (23:4):

<sup>4</sup> He is like the light of morning,  
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,  
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land. (NRSV)

The Targum does not recognize the continuance of the sentence from verse 3 to verse 4. It interprets verse 4 separately as a description of the righteous. They are like the morning sun, and they are rising on a cloudless morning. After this translation, the Targum adds a benediction on the righteous people, using the imagery of the farmer waiting for rain:

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<sup>14</sup> So also Smelik, *De stiefapostel*, 94.

It shall be good to you who are longing for the years of consolation to come. Behold, like a farmer who is hoping in dry years that rain will come down upon the land.<sup>15</sup>

Both texts, the letter of James and Targum Samuel in its addition to David's last words, are about the end of the world. James speaks about the coming of Jesus Christ, both before and after the image of the farmer. Targum Samuel calls its translation of David's poem, not his "last words," but his words about the last things:

And these are the prophetic words of David, which he prophesied for the end of the world, for the days of consolation which are to come.<sup>16</sup>

The days of consolation are to come after the end of the world, when the present world ends and God creates the world to come. These are the days that the righteous in verse 4 are hoping for. And this continuous hoping is compared with a farmer waiting for the rain to come, just as it is done by James in his letter.

Yet, there are some differences that indicate that James did not use the Targum, nor did the Targum use James. In the first place, James speaks about one metaphorical year while the Targum speaks about several years. James refers to the yearly cycle of sowing, waiting, growing, and harvesting. After sowing, farmers have to wait each year for the seed to germinate and to grow. On the other hand, the Targum speaks of dry years and the hope that rain will come down upon the land in the coming year. The Targum does not refer to the yearly cycle, but to an exceptional situation of drought.

Second, the two images are similar, but not identical. In Targum Jonathan a farmer has to wait for rain, in James' letter he has to wait for the plants to grow due to the rain. The similarity is that it is not the farmer's responsibility to do anything about it. The end of the world, the great consolation that God will wipe every tear from our eyes and that there will be no more death, no more mourning and

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<sup>15</sup> My translation: Van Staaldoune-Sulman, *The Targum of Samuel*, 673.

<sup>16</sup> My translation: Van Staaldoune-Sulman, *The Targum of Samuel*, 665.

crying, and no more pain (Rev 21:4), is in God's hand and cannot be determined by human action.

A last difference is, of course, that the Targum would never describe the end of the world with the phrase "the coming of the Lord," and even if it did, it would not be referring to Jesus Christ. And while the Targum takes "the end of the world" as the main theme of David's words, James refers to the second coming only in passing, stressing the patience and endurance of the believers.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

Two examples suffice to show the intricate relationship between Targum Jonathan and the New Testament books. There are definitely correspondences and parallels: I could also refer to the term "second death" in Targum Isaiah and the book of Revelation,<sup>18</sup> or the way Targum Isaiah and Revelation describe the new Jerusalem.<sup>19</sup> And there are similar exegetical phenomena, such as combining texts into one new quote,<sup>20</sup> or the enormous reverence for pious Israelites in Targumic texts and, for example, Hebrews 11.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, there is no hint that one of the two depended on the written version of the other, nor that the two depended on a common written source text or a common standardized oral source text. There are always too many differences for these assumptions.

What we can say is that the two pieces of literature regularly draw material from a common first-century theological milieu.<sup>22</sup> Jews of the first century were involved in interpreting and applying

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. De Vries, *De brief van Jakobus*, 172.

<sup>18</sup> Houtman – Misset, "The Fate of the Wicked."

<sup>19</sup> Van Ruiten, "De intertextuele relatie van jesaja 65 met apokalyps 21:1–8."

<sup>20</sup> Houtman – Van Staalduine-Sulman, "Joden, christenen en hun Targoem," 152–153.

<sup>21</sup> More examples in Van Staalduine-Sulman, "Animosity in Targumic Literature," 128–147.

<sup>22</sup> For the dating of a first version of Targum Samuel in the first century, see Van Staalduine-Sulman, *The Targum of Samuel*, 711, also referring to Smelik, *The Targum of Judges* and Chilton, *The Glory of Israel* with similar conclusions on Targum Judges and Targum Isaiah.



the Hebrew texts and – despite all the differences – used similar techniques and imagery to do so. Some phenomena are identical because of identical theological reasoning, e.g., that God did not *search* for a successor of Saul, but that He had *found* one. Other phenomena are similar because of standardized imagery, such as rain or dew as images of the new life after the resurrection.<sup>23</sup>

All in all, we can say that: (1) it is hard to find identical forms of exegesis, although there are several similar cases and parallels; (2) we must do our best to describe similar cases as precise as possible, because there are both similarities and contradictions in these cases; (3) there is no direct relationship between Targum Jonathan and the New Testament; but (4) they can be used in a very cautious way as a mutual means to better understand the other and (5) to better understand the way Jewish authors – I include the New Testament Jewish followers of Jesus here – read and understood their Scriptures.

### **Złożona relacja pomiędzy Targumem Jonatana a Nowym Testamentem na przykładzie „targumicznych” stwierdzeń w Dz 13,21–22 i Jk 5,7–8**

**Abstrakt:** Istnieją podobieństwa pomiędzy sposobem, w jaki Targum Jonatana wyjaśnia hebrajski tekst Biblii, a sposobem, w jaki autorzy Nowego Testamentu używają tych samych tekstów. Trudno jest jednak zidentyfikować dokładną relację pomiędzy Targumem Jonatana a Nowym Testamentem. W niniejszym artykule analizowane są dwa przykłady „targumicznych” przekładów w Nowym Testamencie: Dz 13,21–22 i Jk 5,7–8. Na podstawie badań możemy stwierdzić, że (1) trudno znaleźć identyczną formę egzegezy, choć jest kilka podobnych przypadków i paralel; (2) musimy dołożyć wszelkich starań, by opisać podobne przypadki jak najdokładniej, gdyż w tych przypadkach są zarówno podobieństwa, jak i różnice; (3) nie ma żadnej bezpośredniej relacji pomiędzy Targumem Jonatana a Nowym Testamentem; ale (4) mogą być one ostrożnie używane jako środek do ich lepszego wzajemnego zrozumienia, a także (5) do lepszego rozumienia, jak żydowscy autorzy – a włączam tu także nowotestamentalnych żydowskich naśladowców Jezusa – czytali i rozumieli ich Pisma.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Targum Jonatana, targumy, Dzieje Apostolskie, List Jakuba, egzegeza żydowska

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Sysling, *Tehiyat Ha-Metim*, 161.

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