

**“A MAN IN SUFFERING, ACQUAINTED WITH THE
BEARING OF SICKNESS”
THE NEW TESTAMENT RECEPTION OF ISA 52–53 AS A
READING OF THE LXX**

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Abstract. New Testament authors use mostly the Greek version of Isaiah 52–53 for various purposes. The perspective on Jesus’ ministry is broad. The few passages that address the meaning of his death envisage mainly the apotropaic function or build on the humiliation-exaltation scheme. In this early stage of reception, the relevant passages from Isa 53 are not quoted. This is partly due to the particularities of the LXX-translation, which eliminates a number of details that could sustain the idea of vicarious suffering and atonement. Beside the Christological-soteriological interpretation of Jesus’ ministry and/or suffering, the quotes serve ethical-paraenetical purposes or address the scope and reception of the gospel.

Keywords: reception of Isaiah 52–53, LXX, New Testament, Christology, paraenesis, apotropaic death, humiliation-exaltation

1. Introductory considerations

Isaiah 52,13–53,12 (in the following Isa 53) is counted among the scriptural passages that have exerted the most significant influence on early Christian thought, in particular on defining Jesus’ identity and interpreting his suffering and death. This common opinion is not groundless, if one looks at the New Testament quotations and allusions. Nonetheless, a careful examination of the manner in which the New Testament uses this passage should prevent sweeping generalisations and insufficiently founded conclusions, as for instance the role of the text in interpreting Jesus’ passion as the atoning death of the Servant-Christ.

The clear citations in the New Testament are limited to seven (Matt 8,17; Luke 22,37; Acts 8,32-33; John 12,38; Rom 10,16; 15,21, and 1 Pet 2,22-25).¹ This

¹ See NA²⁷, 794; Bradley H. MCLEAN, *Citations and Allusions to Jewish Scripture in Early Christian and Jewish Writings through 180 C.E.*, Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1992, 94-95; Darrell D. HANNAH, “Isaiah within Judaism of the Second Temple Period”, in Steve MOYISE, Maarten J. J. MENKEN (eds.), *Isaiah in the New Testament: The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel*, London and New York: T & T Clark, 2005, 7–33 (28, n. 88); Christina ESCHNER, *Gestorben und hingegeben „für“ die Sünder. Die griechische Konzeption des Unheil abwendenden Sterbens und deren paulinische Aufnahme für die Deutung des Todes Jesu Christi*, 1: *Auslegungen der paulinischen Formulierungen* (WMANT 122), Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2010, 69. Martin HENGEL spoke of ten quotations and thirty-two allusions, based on NA²⁶, 761 (*The Atonement. The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament*, London: SCM, 1981, 60).