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“SOMETHING MORE THAN SOLOMON”
MATTHEW’S INTERACTION WITH THE SOLOMONIC MAGIC TRADITION

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Introduction

There have been oceans of ink spilled on Jesus’ declaration in Matt 12: 39 that the “sign of Jonah the prophet” was about to be given, and on his subsequent statement: “behold something more than Jonah is here.”¹ Yet, there is a great paucity of discussion on Jesus’ comparison of himself to Solomon found in the following verse.² Calvin, for example, spends six paragraphs commenting on the nature of the sign of Jonah, the relationship between the person and mission of Jesus to that of Jonah, and the Pharisees’ heart posture in comparison to the Ninevites’, while only devoting one sentence to the relationship between Jesus and Solomon.³ This disparity ought not be the case. This paper intends to examine Jesus’ self-comparison to Solomon within its literary and historical context as to better understand the content of Solomon’s wisdom, or what Jesus’ audience would have known it to be. Accomplishing this will prove invaluable in discerning the full Christological impact of this statement and help modern readers hear it in the full force that it originally carried.

Literary Context for Matthew 12:42

Matthew 12:42 does not stand as a lone statement, but rather it falls within the pericope of verses 38-42: an excursus where the Pharisees ask Jesus to show them a sign, and Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for their evil in asking this; namely, how they are a malicious and

¹ All NT quotations are the author’s translation unless otherwise noted.

² For a brief overview of the commentary material see Larry Perkins, “‘Greater Than Solomon’ (Matt 12:42),” *Trinity Journal* 19, no. 2 (1998): 207–17, AtlaSerials, Religion Collection (ATLA0000983823), 207-208.

³ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), vol. 2 at Matthew 12:38-42, <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom32/calcom32.ii.xvii.html>. This disparity of interest holds true for most commentaries.

adulterous generation.⁴ As Lategan outlines, this excursus expands and intensifies the themes presented earlier in chapters 11-12.⁵ In 11:20-24 for instance, the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida are condemned for their unresponsiveness to the works that Jesus performed among them. Not only are they condemned, but in v22 they are told that the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon will find that “it will be more endurable for them on the day of judgement than for you.” In 12:38-42, the Pharisees are told that the Ninevites and the Queen of the south will not just endure the day of judgement more than them, but that they will rise up and judge and condemn them. This is unsurprising as it fits with Matthew’s harsh treatment of the Pharisees throughout his account.⁶

This example of reiteration and intensification of earlier themes is one of many found in vv38-42, and in conjunction with the preceding pericope (vv22-37) it acts as a conclusion to Jesus’ encounters with the Pharisees throughout ch.11-12. As Lategan says, “in more than one respect [vv22-37] forms the climax of the antithesis between Jesus and the Pharisees, or rather between the Spirit of God and the spirit of Beelzebub,” and “[vv38-42] is closely linked to [vv22-37] and exhibits a further concentration of themes.”⁷ Indeed, the features of reiteration, duality, and intensification are constantly at play throughout the Matthean text.

For example, 12:22-45 has a particularly striking structural and verbal reiteration in 15:32-16:12.⁸ Both instances feature three common characteristics: Jesus’ performance of a miracle, the Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign, Jesus’ rebuke pointing to the sign of Jonah, and a teaching section based on the aforementioned miracle. However, Section B does not seem to present an intensification of Section A. Despite the strong sense of commonality between these

⁴ Gk: πονηρὰ καὶ μοιχαλίς. Μοιχαλίς here draws on the language of spiritual adultery used throughout the OT such as in Hos. 3:1 LXX. See LSJ, s.v. “Μοιχαλίς.” This use indicates Jesus’ rhetorical reversal of the Pharisee’s criticism. They criticized Jesus’ exorcisms, saying that they were done by the power of a foreign god, and Jesus reverses this criticism by referring to them as adulterous in the same way that Hosea criticized Israel’s worship of Baal.

⁵ Bernard C (Bernard Christiaan) Lategan, “STRUCTURAL INTERRELATIONS IN MATTHEW 11-12,” *Neotestamentica* 11, no. 1 (1977): 115–29, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS (ATLAiREM221021000482), 125.

⁶ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Rev. ed., reprinted (Eerdmans, 1994), 223.

⁷ Lategan, “STRUCTURAL INTERRELATIONS IN MATTHEW 11-12,” 123,124.

⁸ From here on, these passages will be referred to as Section A and Section B respectively.

sections, there are also notable differences, namely that Jesus' specific rebukes are contextualized to their present conflict, and that the narrative focus differs in each section. While both rebukes refer to the coming sign of Jonah, the remainder of the rebuke seems definitively set in the framing device of miracle and subsequent teaching based on that miracle. Those being exorcism in Section A and the producing of bread in Section B.

Section A		Section B	
Jesus performs an exorcism.	12:22	Jesus produces bread.	15:32-39
Criticism from the Pharisees concerning the nature of Jesus' exorcism, and Jesus' response concerning exorcism and the nature of their hearts.	12:24-37		
Pharisees and Scribes ask for a sign “ἀπὸ σοῦ.”	12:38	Pharisees and Sadducees as for a sign “ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.”	16:1
“γενεὰ πονηρὰ καὶ μοιχαλὶς σημεῖον ἐπιζητεῖ, καὶ σημεῖον οὐ δοθήσεται αὐτῇ εἰ μὴ τὸ σημεῖον Ἰωνᾶ τοῦ προφήτου.”	12:39	“γενεὰ πονηρὰ καὶ μοιχαλὶς σημεῖον ἐπιζητεῖ, καὶ σημεῖον οὐ δοθήσεται αὐτῇ εἰ μὴ τὸ σημεῖον Ἰωνᾶ.”	16:4

Jesus furthers his response by criticizing the Pharisees and asserting that he is more than Jonah and more than Solomon.	12:40-42		
Jesus teaches through a parable concerning exorcism. (Criticism of the Pharisees).	12:43-45	Jesus teaches through an analogy concerning leaven and bread. (Criticism of the Pharisees).	16:5-12

As outlined in the chart above, the most prominent differences in Section A and Section B are the discourse on exorcism, the origin of the requested sign, and the Jesus' messianic claims with referent to Jonah and Solomon.⁹ The additional information in section A does not undercut the fact that they share an identical pattern, and as such, examining Section B is useful for elucidating some of the rhetorical strategies that Matthew makes use of in Section A. The main illumination that Section B provides is the relationship of the bracketing topics to the interior discussion.

The miracle account in Section B is heavily and clearly laden with Mosaic allusions.¹⁰ However, Matthew highlights two important distinctions between Jesus' miracle of bread and

⁹ 16:2-3 is missing from the earliest manuscripts and is considered dubious. The issue of its inclusion in the text is beyond the scope of this project. Further, the contents of vv2-3 add little to the discussion at hand, so they will be set aside and will not be commented on. See Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 33.

¹⁰ Stock, though he does not specifically comment on Matt 15: 32-39, says concerning Mark 6:30-44 that "In the wilderness spot Jesus, the new leader or shepherd of the pilgrim people of God, feeds the newly pledged new Israel with miraculous food, as Moses had done before him." Augustine Stock, *The Way in the Wilderness: Exodus, Wilderness, and Moses Themes in Old Testament and New* (Collegeville, Minnesota; The Liturgical Press, 1969), 78. Allison, also not commenting specifically on Matt 15:32-39, says "[Jesus] is even purported to have retired into the wilderness, there to perform a feeding miracle, one strongly reminiscent of Moses' provision of manna." Dale C. Allison Jr, *The New Moses : A Matthean Typology* (Wipf and Stock, 2013), eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) (2616033), 97.

Moses'. In Ex 16:2-4, the people of Israel are fed in the desert¹¹ with "bread out of heaven,"¹² because of their grumbling. In Matt 15:32-39, Jesus feeds the people in a desert¹³ with bread (presumably produced in his own hands) because of his compassion for the crowd.¹⁴ The source and motivation of these two miracle accounts stand in contrast to each other.

This backdrop gives the necessary context for the Pharisees' request in 16:1. Matthew positions their request for a sign "ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ" in such a way that it contrasts the Pharisees (and their grumbling) over against the crowd that he just fed, who are likely Gentiles.¹⁵ If this is the case, then the scene would constitute a new Exodus event where Jesus takes on the role of deliverer and the Gentile crowd constitute a new Israel. Not only does this miracle account and confrontation present Jesus as a Moses-figure but also a God-figure since he is the one who has compassion on the people and produces the bread. The Pharisees then, are painted as ignorant and negligent of Jesus' work and identity precisely because of their preconceived notions of what the Messiah should do, and how he should do it. Matthew presents Jesus in Mosaic terms only to subvert that image and show Jesus as a different sort of Moses-figure. Hence, Jesus' teaching analogy of bread and leaven in 16:5-12 is thematically linked to both the miracle worked in 15:32-39 and to the confrontation with the Pharisees in 16:1-4, with the confrontation necessarily contextualized by the bracketing passages.

If this bracketing and contextualizing relationship in Section B can be applied to Section A, then one should expect the theme of exorcism to contextualize the confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees therein. Indeed, the parallel passage in Mark 3:20-35 contains neither the reference to Solomon nor the parable on exorcism, but is bracketed by discussions of Jesus' family. Matthew's alteration of the Markan passage indicates that he has a different focus and application for Jesus' statements. To be sure, the proximity of the exorcism parable to Jesus'

¹¹ LXX: ἔρημος

¹² LXX: ἄρτους ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

¹³ Gk. ἔρημίᾳ

¹⁴ David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament). Baker Academic, 2008. EBSCOhost, V.A.8.

¹⁵ Turner, *Matthew*. V.A.8.

claim to be more than Solomon should, on its own, give the reader an indication that there is a connection between the two.

The hermeneutical problem with this connection is the lack of direct biblical evidence linking exorcism to either of the figures mentioned by Jesus. In fact, the only OT reference to exorcism in any form is attributed to David (1 Sam 16:23). If one is strictly adhering to the biblical account of Solomon, then his inclusion in Matt 12:42 seems to function only as a pun on the crowd's question in v23 and as the second half of a North-South merism. However, reading the statement only as pun or a merism would make Jesus' reference to the Solomon's wisdom seem entirely arbitrary to the conversation taking place.

Concerning the content of Solomon's wisdom, 1 Kings 4:29-34 contains its only lengthy description. The author goes into great detail concerning Solomon's creative talents as well as the specific topics which he was known to speak on:

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. He spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish. And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom. (ESV)

The immediate context of Jesus' statement has no connection to proverbs, psalms, trees, beasts, birds, reptiles, or fish. Even with the texts of Proverbs, Songs, and Ecclesiastes taking into account, there seems to be no direct connection to the discussion at hand other than the fact that the crowd said "perhaps this one is the son of David," and both Prov 1:1 and Eccl 1:1 introduce

the author as the “son of David” (ESV).¹⁶ Even still, there is no apparent connection between Solomon’s wisdom in the biblical account and the present conversation.

Therefore, if one considers only the biblical evidence when interpreting this exchange, then they will make little if any connection between Jesus’ rebuttal and the context in which it takes place. This seems to be the implicit stance of many modern readers. However, when Jesus’ words are understood in the light of 2nd Temple Jewish literature, it becomes incredibly clear what he was communicating to the crowd and the Pharisees standing before him. Jesus is presenting himself as superior to the normal mode of exorcism that was being practiced at that time, hence his rhetorical question in v27: “if I cast out the demons by Beelzeboul, by whom do your sons cast them out?”¹⁷ To understand the connection between Solomon and exorcism in the first century, an examination of the Solomonic tradition is necessary.

Historical Context for Matthew 12:42

As Carroll states, “Solomonic legend evolved through four clearly perceptible stages.”¹⁸ The first of these evolutions is decidedly pre-Christian, spanning from the writing of the OT historical books, to the close of the first century BC. This period contains exaggerated accounts of Solomon’s wisdom which include his power over demons by the use of “archaic talismans,” though at this point his abilities as an exorcist are still rooted in his possession of a God-given wisdom.¹⁹ The second stage, which spanned from the first century to the middle of the second century AD, retains the earlier features of the tradition, but expands the details of them to include Solomon’s use of specific talismans and formulae such as “his ring, seal, shield, magic roots,

¹⁶ Duling argues that these texts’ attribution to Solomon is a “*literary* tradition,” but likely not a historical one. Dennis C Duling, “Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David,” *Harvard Theological Review* 68, nos. 3–4 (1975): 235–52, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS (ATLA0000760548), 237. Regardless of these texts’ actual authorship, they would likely have been regarded by most as Solomonic due to the authors’ identification as a son of David.

¹⁷ Cf. Mark 9:38; Acts 19:11–20. In the Markan passage, the report of the disciples’ concern about the exorcist centers on him not being a follower of Jesus, not that his casting out of demons. It seems then that there were other groups or persons who practiced exorcism, and that it was somewhat common.

¹⁸ Scott T Carroll, “The Apocalypse of Adam and Pre-Christian Gnosticism,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 44, no. 3 (1990): 263–79, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS (ATLA0000874977), 272.

¹⁹ Carroll, “The Apocalypse of Adam and Pre-Christian Gnosticism,” 272.

incantations, magic bottles, [etc.].”²⁰ This is also the period that introduces the concept of Solomon using demons to construct the Temple, though they are not used to complete any other tasks at this point. The third evolution, from the late second through fourth centuries AD, sees the distinctive shift from Solomon as primarily an exorcist to Solomon as primarily a magician, as “his power was no longer readily identified with God,” and going beyond the construction of the temple, “demons were used by Solomon to accomplish manifold tasks.”²¹ The fourth and final evolution is the broad appropriation of Solomon legends in Muslim sources such as the Qur'an and Hadith.²²

It is important to differentiate these developmental stages so that anachronisms are not read back into Jesus' statement. The later ideas of Solomon using demons to seduce women, as described in the *Apocalypse of Adam*, or controlling an army of jinn as in the Qur'an should not be read back into texts from first century.²³ Therefore, while the latter two evolutions are interesting in their own right, the relation of Matt 12:42 to the Solomonic tradition will only pertain to the first two evolutions.

The First Evolution

Solomon's esoteric features seem to first arise in the second-first centuries BC.²⁴ Before this, the majority of Solomon' descriptions may be idealized or diminished, but he is always shown in “‘normal’ terms: thus, the king is a builder, wise, a judge, priest, sinner.”²⁵ However,

²⁰ Carroll, “The Apocalypse of Adam and Pre-Christian Gnosticism,” 272.

²¹ Carroll, “The Apocalypse of Adam and Pre-Christian Gnosticism,” 272.

²² See examples in Qur'an 27:17 and *Sahih al-Bukhari*, no. 3423. In the Quranic example, Solomon possesses an army that consists of jinn as well as men and birds. In al-Bukhari's Hadith, the Prophet is overcome by a demon sent from the jinn, but he is able to overcome the demon by the use of Solomon's invocation. Though Carroll does not explicitly state it, this stage of the tradition would also likely encompass the later Christian and Jewish interpretations of Solomon that can be found in the *Clavicula Salomonis*, the *Liber Belial*, and *Git*. 68a:7-68b:20.

²³ cf. Mothy Varkey, *Salvation in Continuity: Reconsidering Matthew's Soteriology*, 1st ed, Emerging Scholars Series (Fortress Press, 2017), 59-60. Varkey does correctly identify Matthew's use of Solomonic imagery and allusion to underscore Jesus' role as an exorcist, but he does so using much later sources which contain aspects of Solomonic lore not likely present in the first century.

²⁴ Pablo A. Torijano, “Solomon the Esoteric King: From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition,” Supplements to the “Journal for the Study of Judaism” 73 (Brill, 2002), 41.

²⁵ Torijano, “Solomon the Esoteric King,” 41.

there was a consistent exaggeration and Hellenization of his characteristics. The LXX translators for example, both expand Solomon's output of psalms (from 1,005 in the MT to 5,000 in the LXX) and present him in terms comparable to those used to describe Hellenistic kings and philosophers.²⁶ Indeed, this Hellenization seems to have taken place across the board, seeing as how "Eupolemus portrayed Solomon as a very generous king, following a Hellenistic model," and "Aristobulus... claimed Solomon 'as one of his philosophical predecessors' who exceeded the Peripatetic school with his acuteness of expression."²⁷

In addition to this Hellenized portrait of Solomon, a stream of thought developed between the second century BC and the first century AD, though still pre-Christian or at least independent to the Christian movement. This period is when Solomon begins to be explicitly described as an exorcist, with one variation viewing David's ability to exercise Saul's demon as something that would be passed on to his son. A direct statement of Solomon's esoteric knowledge can be seen in the pseudepigraphal Wisdom of Solomon (150 BC-50 AD),²⁸ which states that Solomon knows "The natures of animals and the tempers of wild beasts, the powers of spirits and the reasonings of men."²⁹ Going further than this, Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (135 BC-70 AD)³⁰ frames Solomon's exorcistic abilities around a prophetic utterance from David

²⁶ Torijano, "Solomon the Esoteric King," 29-33.

²⁷ Torijano, "Solomon the Esoteric King," 37. Carroll, "The Apocalypse of Adam and Pre-Christian Gnosticism," 264. A notable counterexample to this broad Hellenization comes from Ben Sirach's treatment of Solomon, which Torijano says is "a much more 'Jewish' image than the LXX, which in contrast, attempts to transform Solomon into a Hellenized king." 35.

²⁸ Perkins, "Greater than Solomon," 210. Cf. Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 444. Ferguson dates Wis. to 50 BC. A slightly wider dating range is offered by Carroll, who places its origins sometime between 220 BC and 50 AD; see Carroll, "The Apocalypse of Adam and Pre-Christian Gnosticism," 264.

²⁹ Wis 7:20 (NRSV). For a note on translation, see Perkins "Greater than Solomon," 209-210. Perkins argues that the parallelism in the list necessitates the translation of "spirits" and not "winds" as in the KJV. See also Duling, "Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David," 238.

³⁰ "Pseudo-Philo" transl. with intro. by D. J. Harrington in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* ed. by J. H. Charlesworth (Doubleday, 1983), II. 299. Cf. Carroll, "The Apocalypse of Adam and Pre-Christian Gnosticism," 268. Carroll places the date "between the late first and early second century AD." Harrington's observations regarding Pseudo-Philo's language about the temple convincingly place the document's date before the temple's destruction in 70 AD.

who sings a psalm to the spirit choking Saul, “let the new womb from which I was born rebuke you, from which after a time one born from my loins will rule over you.”³¹

The Second Evolution

By the first century AD, three major sources indicate that Solomon was now fully considered to be the “Jewish magician *par excellence*.”³² 11QPsAp, Josephus *AJ* 8.2.5, and the *Testament of Solomon* all indicate Solomon’s connection to psalms and incantations used to cast out demons.

11QPsAp (50-70 AD)³³

This scroll contains four psalms; the first three are non-biblical, but the fourth is a copy of Psalm 91 which was, “according to the rabbinic tradition, to be used as an exorcistic device.”³⁴ The inclusion of Ps 91 may serve to attribute pseudepigraphal Davidic authorship to the whole scroll, but this point is contested by Garcia Martinez who argues that the mention of Solomon in column 1 “may indicate that the scroll did not consist *per se* of four songs of David against the demons, but of a collection of such texts,” such that the texts are grouped by purpose

³¹ *LAB* 60:3 transl. D. J. Harrington. See Duling, “Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David,” 240-241. Duling notes that there are three possibilities for Pseudo-Philo’s intended subject of this prophetic psalm saying “Who is the one of David’s loins yet to be born who will subdue the demons? Three solutions have been offered: Jesus; the Jewish Messiah who, after the pattern of T Levi 18, binds Belial and overcomes evil spirits; and Solomon. The prophecy would appear to me to have strong linguistic contacts with the royal tradition, implying the Jewish Messiah, but it is also important to recall that T Levi is not simply ‘royal.’ Further, royal language does not *exclude* Solomon! Thus, Solomon in this context remains a strong possibility.” If Harrington’s proposition for the Palestinian provenance of *LAB* is accurate, then the prophecy’s Solomon-focus would square nicely with other (roughly contemporary) Palestinian sources: 11QPsAp and Josephus, *AJ* 8.2.5.

³² Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed., (Eerdmans, 2009), 231. Cf. Duling, “Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David,” 242. Pablo A. Torijano, “Solomon the Esoteric King,” 2.

³³ Torijano, “Solomon the Esoteric King,” 46. The dating here is for the scroll itself, as it was written “in a late, highly developed Herodian hand.” Torijano entertains the notion that the psalms may be far older if they are indeed a *copy* of an earlier manuscript, and not a novel invention of the Qumranites. Indeed, if other later documents (such as *AJ* and *T. Solomon*) developed independently from the Qumran community, then the origin of the tradition would be sometime in the first or second century BC.

³⁴ Torijano, “Solomon the Esoteric King,” 47.

rather than by authorship.³⁵ Regardless of authorship, the second psalm in the scroll indicates that Solomon is the one intended to call on Yahweh so that the demons may be cast out:

2) [Of David. About the words of incantation] in the name of [YHWH...] 3) [...] Solomon and he will invok[e in the name of YHWH 4) in order to be delivered of any plague of the spi]rits and the demons [and the Liliths, 5) the owls and the jackals]; these are [the de]mons and the prin[ce of animos]ity 6) [is Belial,] who [rules]over an abys[s of dark]ness. 7) [...] in order to [...] and to make gre[at the G]od of 8) [...sons of] his people have completed the cure 9) [...which/who on] your name have leant...³⁶

Besides the fact that 11QPsAp attributes the ability to preform exorcisms to Solomon (a fact which is not entirely surprising given the earlier documents mentioned above), the scroll also makes use of an exorcistic identification formula that is made extremely prominent in the later *Testament of Solomon*: “Who are you?”³⁷

The Testament of Solomon (100-300 AD)³⁸

This text contains a fully realized and dramatized portrait of Solomon as an exorcist, and seeing how such details are lacking from all earlier sources, it is unlikely that these details were available in the first century. The defining narrative is Solomon’s use of demons to build the

³⁵ Florentino García Martínez, *Qumran cave 11. 2: 11Q2 - 18, 11Q20 - 31*, Discoveries in the Judaean desert 23 (Clarendon Press, 1998), 183. Quoted from Torijano, “Solomon the Esoteric King,” 47.

³⁶ This is Torijano’s reconstruction and translation. See Torijano, “Solomon the Esoteric King,” 48. Torijano also offers a “plausible reconstruction of the lacuna” in vv1-2: “Of David. Concerning the words of incantation in the name of YHWH that king David gave to his son, Solomon.” 49. This presents Solomon as the “heir to a tradition that apparently was linked to his father David.”

³⁷ Torijano, “Solomon the Esoteric King,” 51-53.

³⁸ The dating of this text is particularly difficult as it is likely that the text went through “a number of recensions” and “its precise date is difficult to establish.” Duling, “Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David,” 242. For an overview of the manuscript tradition and recension history, see Torijano, “Solomon the Esoteric King,” 54-55. Torijano concludes that “the traditions included within the *Testament* are very likely at least as old as the first century C.E., as the traditions preserved by Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities*, Wisdom of Solomon and 11QPsAp suggest.” Further, John Nolland notes that “‘Queen of the South’ is not an OT designation, but its use in the T. Solomon 19:3; 21:1 may indicate its currency in Jewish tradition (Christian content in the Testament of Solomon makes this uncertain, but there is no evident link with the Gospel texts in T. Solomon. 19:3; 21:1.” John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Eerdmans, 2005), 512n111. This agrees with Duling’s conclusion that there was an earlier oral tradition that informed both the NT and the T. Solomon. See Duling “Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David,” 242.

temple throughout the course of the text. Indeed, “The motif of temple building, which introduces the story, is well maintained throughout, entering into almost every section.”³⁹ This temple feature, as Carroll notes, is also a definitively later addition to the legend.⁴⁰ These obviously later developments coupled with the manuscript tradition led many to conclude that it was a medieval document.⁴¹

However, despite the fact that many features of the text are later developments, it also contains earlier, decidedly pre-Talmudic elements in the demonology and exorcism rituals. Therefore, once the syncretistic mess is untangled, “the *Test* comes to be of real assistance in reconstructing the thought world of the Palestinian Jew in the first century of our era, and it is, therefore, important not only for the student of church history, but for the New Testament and the Jewish scholar.”⁴² If nothing else, the testament indicates that the Solomonic tradition in the first century had significant enough staying power and appeal (to Jews and Christians alike!) so as to warrant the testament’s construction.

The features of the Solomonic tradition that can be drawn from the testament without risk of inserting anachronisms are the ones that are paralleled by other first century sources such as 11QPsAp and *AJ* 8.2.5. As noted above, the Qumranic exorcism formula (“who are you”) plays a prominent role in the testament, appearing in every exorcism that Solomon conducts.⁴³ The formula, while having some variations, follows a stable pattern of interactions. Torijano outlines it as follows:

- a. Identificatory formula (“who are you,” “what is your name”; τίς εἰ σύ, τίς κλήσις σου;)
- b. Self-identification of the demon (“I am called” / “I am”; Χ καλοῦμαι / ἐγώ εἰμι)
- c. Astrological question (“tell me in what Zodiac sign you reside”; λέγε μοι ἐν ποίῳ ζῳδίῳ κεῖσαι)

³⁹ Chester C. McCown, “The Testament of Solomon: Edited from Manuscripts at Mount Athos, Bologna, Holkham Hall, Jerusalem, London, Milan, Paris and Vienna” (The University of Chicago, 1922), 4.

⁴⁰ Carroll, “The Apocalypse of Adam and Pre-Christian Gnosticism,” 272.

⁴¹ McCown, “The Testament of Solomon,” 105.

⁴² McCown, “Testament of Solomon,” 3.

⁴³ Torijano, “Solomon the Esoteric King,” 61-64.

- d. Self-characterization and description of the demon
- e. Mention of the thwarting angel or archangel
- f. Sealing of the demon
- g. Commissioning of the demon to some task in the building of the Temple.⁴⁴

In addition to this, the testament also makes significant use of Solomon's ring, a distinctive feature found in Josephus' account of Eleazar the exorcist.

The Antiquities of the Jews 8.2.44-49 (90-120 AD)⁴⁵

Antiquities marks a turning point in Josephus' thinking. Earlier in his career, during the writing of *Wars*, he certainly "spoke for the Roman Empire and the Flavian dynasty," however "at the end of the eighties and in the early nineties Josephus went through a phase of a new acceptance of his being a Jew."⁴⁶ This "new acceptance" of his Jewishness led Josephus to embark on a rhetorical historiographical project so as to speak "as the apologist for Judaism."⁴⁷ More than being a merely apologetic work, as Andre Paul argues, "the major objective of the Antiquities is undoubtedly to try to readjust the equilibrium between [Christians and Jews]" and to "re-establish the basic principles and conditions of a vital truth which in his eyes was now seriously compromised."⁴⁸ If this is the case, then it is not unlikely for Josephus to have presented his account of the exorcism performed by Eleazar as piece of (simultaneously) counter-Christian and pro-Jewish rhetoric, seeing how exorcism was a prominent activity in both Jesus' ministry and the Apostolic ministry, indeed it was required.⁴⁹ Josephus' account of Eleazar's exorcism ritual can be understood as an intentionally and overtly Jewish depiction,

⁴⁴ Torijano, "Solomon the Esoteric King," 59-60.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 486. Ferguson dates *AJ* to "93 or 94" AD, though I am unsure how he comes to such a precise a date.

⁴⁶ Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 486; André Paul, "Flavius Josephus' Antiquities of the Jews: An Anti-Christian Manifesto," *New Testament Studies* 31, no. 3 (1985): 473–80, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS (ATLA0000949748), 479.

⁴⁷ Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 486. Cf. Dennis C Duling, "The Eleazar Miracle and Solomon's Magical Wisdom in Flavius Josephus's *Antiquitates Judaicae* 8:42-49," *Harvard Theological Review* 78, nos. 1–2 (1985): 1–25, Atla Religion Database with AtlaSerials PLUS (ATLA0000967733), 6-9.

⁴⁸ Paul, "Flavius Josephus' Antiquities of the Jews," 480.

⁴⁹ See Mark 3:15, 6:7; Matt 10:1; Luke 9:1.

which means that it likely reflects traditions that would be known and practiced in the wider Jewish context and particularly in his native land of Palestine.

Concerning Solomon, Josephus recounts much of the same information found in 1 Kings, though he expands the quantity of songs and proverbs from both the LXX's 3,000 songs and 5,000 parables and the MT's 1,005 songs and 3,000 proverbs to "a thousand and five books of odes and songs, and three thousand books of parables and similitudes" (Josephus, *Ant.* 8.2:44 [Marcus]) which continues the trend of exaggeration found in the first evolution. In addition to this, Josephus adds that God granted Solomon knowledge of exorcistic arts:

God granted him knowledge of the art used against demons for the benefit and healing of men. He also composed incantations by which illnesses are relieved, and left behind forms of exorcisms with which those possessed by demons drive them out, never to return. (Josephus, *Ant.* 8.2:45-46 [Marcus])

Not only does he offer this concrete statement of Solomon's knowledge, but he also offers an example of how this knowledge was used.

He recounts that a man named Eleazar, "in the presence of Vespasian, his sons, tribunes and a number of other soldiers," exercised demons by placing a ring, which contained "one of the roots prescribed by Solomon," under that demoniac's nose, drawing the demon out, and then commanding it to never come back, "speaking Solomon's name and reciting the incantations which he had composed" (Josephus, *Ant.* 8.2:46-48 [Marcus]). Josephus continues on, saying that by this action Solomon was glorified:

When this was done, the understanding and wisdom of Solomon were clearly revealed, on account of which we have been induced to speak of these things, in order that all men may know the greatness of his nature and how God favoured [sic] him, and that no one under the sun may be ignorant of the king's surpassing virtue of every kind. (Josephus, *Ant.* 8.2:49 [Marcus])

One might expect this account to praise Eleazar, seeing as how he is the one performing the act, however, Josephus uses his testimony to acclaim Solomon as a paragon of wisdom and virtue. As Duling states, "the 'acclamation' in Josephus's [sic] story is not in the story; neither does it explicitly acclaim Eleazar or the Deity; rather, it acclaims Solomon whose 'healing substances,'

and whose name and incantations, provide the basis for the action and word of [the miracle worker].”⁵⁰

This exorcism display would have likely taken place between 66-68 AD when Vespasian and his sons were in Judea.⁵¹ For the purposes of the project at hand, we can clearly see that if Josephus is recounting the actions of Eleazar accurately, then there were Jewish exorcists performing rituals prescribed by Solomon and in the name of his at the same time, or before, Matthew was writing his gospel account.

Returning to Matthew

Coming back to the examination of Matthew 12:42, it is clear that Jesus’ claim to be “more than Solomon” is not coincidentally set in the middle of a discussion of exorcism. Nor is it feasible to hold that the statement is related yet somehow independent of the Solomonic tradition. Jesus’ claim stands in the midst of Solomon’s legendary formation, comments on it, and offers a powerful messianic dimension to Jesus’ exorcistic actions during his ministry in Judea:

In the passage, Jesus responded to the Pharisees’ verbal barrage with three closely associated statements which formed a unified reply. His response included a reference to Jonah, to Solomon and finally to a story about exorcism. The association of Solomon with exorcism at this developmental stage of the legend is not at all surprising. Furthermore, in the context of being condemned for exorcising demons by the power of Satan, Jesus claimed that “a greater one than Solomon is here,” and by this asserted superiority over the emerging folklore hero. He made a striking comparison between the developing image of Solomon, the all-wise exorcist, and his own Messianic claims, in the mind of his audience.⁵²

⁵⁰ Duling, “The Eleazar Miracle and Solomon’s Magical Wisdom in Flavius Josephus’s *Antiquitates Judaicae* 8:42-49,” 6.

⁵¹ Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 420-421.

⁵² Carroll, “The Apocalypse of Adam and Pre-Christian Gnosticism,” 267.

Indeed, the power of this dialogue often does not land with modern Christians since the folklore is so far removed from modern dogma. Yet, Jesus is able to put so much weight on his ministry of exorcism that he may claim in v28 that “if I cast out the demons by the spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” If we recall *LAB* 60:3, this connection of exorcism and kingdom no doubt has Solomon, the son of David who prefigured the messiah, in view when.

The fact has been established that Matthew lived and wrote in a context where people commonly viewed Solomon as a king who possessed esoteric knowledge and used that knowledge to cast out demons, therefore two questions arise: why does Matthew have an interest in presenting Jesus over and against Solomon, and how does he do this?

As to the first question, it is likely that there were criticisms leveled against Jesus which painted him as a magician in the pejorative sense.⁵³ Not only does this seem to be an aspect of the Pharisees’ criticism in 12:24, but this would become a very common criticism in later centuries. This criticism can be found in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, where Martyr writes “though they saw such works, they asserted it was magical art. For they dared to call [Jesus] a magician, and a deceiver of the people.”⁵⁴ It can also be found in *Contra Celsum*, where Origen quotes Celsus as saying “Jesus, an illegitimate child, who having hired himself out as a servant in Egypt on account of his poverty, and having there acquired some miraculous powers, on which the Egyptians greatly pride themselves.”⁵⁵ Additionally, many examples of this same sort of criticism can be found in the Talmud and Midrash.⁵⁶ These criticisms are less than novel, and it is no

⁵³ In the Greco-Roman world, terms such as *μαγεία* and *γοντεία* were often associated with trickery or deceit and were used in a pejorative sense; see Duling, “The Eleazar Miracle,” 11-12. However, ‘magic’ was not a hard category in most instances, and what we understand as ‘magic’ was not always viewed in the negative sense. Often times supernatural actions, such as healings, were regarded positively and associated with the actions of gods. Generally, ‘magic’ was not viewed in a negative sense so long as practice proved to be affective; see Pliny the Elder’s view of amulets used to protect against miscarriages (*Natural History*, XXVIII.27.98). For a full discussion on the relationship between magic and miracles in antiquity, see Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times*, Monograph Series / Society for New Testament Studies 55 (Cambridge university press, 1986).

⁵⁴ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 69 (ANF 1), 233.

⁵⁵ Origen, *Against Celsus*, 1.28 (ANF 4), 408.

⁵⁶ Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Commentary on the New Testament From the Talmud and Midrash : Volume 1, Matthew*, trans. Andrew Bowden and Joseph Longarino (Lexham Press, 2022), eBook Collection (EBSCOhost) (3261537), <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=360a9393-409d-335c-baf6-4e0a3fa69287>. §Matt 12:24

stretch to posit that this kind of oppositional rhetoric was used against Jesus' in his own day and in Matthew's. It is likely then, that Matthew has an apologetic purpose in displaying Jesus as something more than a wonderworker or magician.

To accomplish this apologetic end, he presents Jesus as both distinct from and superior to the Solomonic traditions. Distinguishing Jesus' miracles from other magical practices, Matthew seems to intentionally redact specific details found in the Markan account. For example, Mark makes two mentions of Jesus using spit to heal a deaf man (Mark 7:33) and a blind man (Mark 8:23); both of these are absent from Matthew. While this use of spittle does not draw any obvious connections to outside magical traditions, it could be misconstrued as some kind of *γοητεία*. Similarly, Mark records Jesus' interrogation of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20), and while Matthew does record this event (Matt 8:28-32), he removes Jesus' question "what is your name" along with the demon's name. To this point it may simply be the case that Matthew's omission of these details was, as Gundry says, to "insulate Jesus' majesty against any inference that the demoniac succeeded in the adjuration."⁵⁷ However, it seems far more likely that Matthew does this to distinguish Jesus' exorcisms from other Jewish exorcists who likely used the "who are you/what is your name" formula found in 11QPsAp and *T. Solomon*. Otherwise, why would Matthew bother omitting self-identification of the demon?

Far from only making careful distinctions, however, Matthew also seems keen on presenting Jesus as a new and better Solomon. Not only does Matthew feature Jesus' explicit claim that he is more than Solomon, but the parable that follows on the heels of the statement directly shows the inferiority of the Pharisee's practices. Despite the fact that some argue this teaching is "not a comment on evil spirits or exorcism as such," but rather "about temporary or apparent benefit turning to disaster," the context does not permit this to be the only reading.⁵⁸ Indeed, if we allow the discourse on exorcism (vv23-37) and Jesus' claim (v42) to contextualize the parable, then the likely purpose was to teach that this generation was relying on an inferior,

⁵⁷ Robert Horton Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*, Repr (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 159.

⁵⁸ Nolland, John. *The Gospel of Matthew*, 514.

impotent, and impermanent power to cast out demons much like the Jewish exorcists that Paul encounters in Ephesus.⁵⁹

Conclusion

As we have seen, from both a rhetorical-literary analysis and from a historical one, Jesus' claim to be more than Solomon is most likely a reference to his exorcistic ministry's distinctiveness and superiority to other contemporary exorcism practices, those being Solomonic practices. From the overwhelming evidence of these Solomonic practices in literature contemporary with Matthew, to the rhetorical structuring of the scene, it is quite clear that this tradition was in the mind of the people during Jesus' own day and the people in the day of Matthew's writing. Though this analysis has been limited to the scope one phrase, it may yet prove fruitful in the future to examine other aspects of Matthew's thinking in light of this reality.

⁵⁹ Acts 19:11-20

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