

TWENTY-FIVE

JESUS AND PSALM 91 IN LIGHT
OF THE EXORCISM SCROLLS

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RÉSUMÉ

*Jésus et le Psaume 91 à la lumière
des manuscrits d'exorcisme*

Dans le récit de la tentation de Jésus au désert, Satan cite le Psaume 91. La référence à ce psaume a du sens dans ce contexte car les commentateurs ont depuis longtemps soupçonné que le Psaume 91 était utilisé pour se prémunir des assauts des démons. On constate cela dans l'interprétation rabbinique, dans la paraphrase targoumique et dans ce qui semble être une allusion à ce texte dans le *Testament de Lévi* en grec. Certains interprètes ont néanmoins exprimé des réserves, soutenant soit que les traditions rabbiniques et targoumiques sont trop tardives pour être utilisées dans l'interprétation du Nouveau Testament, soit que l'apparente allusions au Psaume 91 dans le *Testament de Lévi* est trop vague ou encore qu'elle pourrait être une glose chrétienne. Toutefois, la découverte, à Qumrân, du Psaume 91 combiné à des psaumes d'exorcisme dans 11QapocrPs (11Q11) a fourni la preuve évidente que ce psaume était apparemment compris, à l'époque de Jésus, comme un texte qui fournissait l'assurance de la protection divine contre les puissances démoniaques.

I. INTRODUCTION

Mark, the oldest of the Synoptic Gospels, provides readers with a very brief account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. The evangelist tells us only that Jesus "was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him" (Mark 1:13). In Mark we hear of no conversation between Jesus and Satan and no one appeals to Scripture. However, in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke readers are presented with much more. These evangelists augment the Markan account of the temptation with a block of

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material drawn from Q, in which Satan three times tempts Jesus and Jesus three times responds with passages from Deuteronomy (cf. Matt 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). In what is the second temptation in Matthew (or third in Luke’s ordering), Satan urges Jesus to fling himself from the pinnacle of the temple. Jesus need not fear, for, after all, the Scripture assures:

τοῖς ἀγγέλοις αὐτοῦ ἐντελεῖται περὶ σοῦ
καὶ ἐπὶ χειρῶν ἀροῦσίν σε, μήποτε προσκόψῃς πρὸς λίθον τὸν πόδα σου.

“He will give his angels charge of you,”
and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot
against a stone.” (Matt 4:6)

Satan has quoted most of Ps 91:11–12, which reads in the Masoretic Text:

.11 בִּי מְלֹאכְיוֹ יִצְוּהוּ אֱלֹהֵי שָׁמַיִם בְּכָל־דְּרָכָיו:
.12 עַל־כַּפְּיָם יִשְׁאוּנֶנּוּ פְּנֵי־הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּאֲבָרֵי רַגְלֵךְ:

11. For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways.
12. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. (RSV)

And in the Old Greek, which translates the Hebrew quite literally:

11. ὅτι τοῖς ἀγγέλοις αὐτοῦ ἐντελεῖται περὶ σοῦ τοῦ διαφυλάξαι σε ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς σου.
12. ἐπὶ χειρῶν ἀροῦσίν σε, μήποτε προσκόψῃς πρὸς λίθον τὸν πόδα σου.

11. For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways.
12. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

Satan’s appeal to Psalm 91 no longer occasions surprise. Commentators have long suspected that this psalm was understood as offering assurance against demonic affliction. This is seen in rabbinic interpretation, in the targumic paraphrase, and in an apparent allusion to the text in the Greek *Testament of Levi*. Nevertheless, some interpreters have expressed reservations, arguing that the rabbinic and targumic traditions are too late to be of use in New Testament interpretation and that the apparent allusion to Psalm 91 in the *Testament of Levi* is either too vague or may actually be a Christian gloss. However, the discovery at Qumran of Psalm 91 in combination with exorcism psalms has pretty well settled the matter once and for all: Psalm 91 apparently was understood in the time of Jesus as offering divine assurances of protection against demonic powers.

In what follows we shall look at 11Q11 (11QapocrPs), in which we find three(?)

exorcism psalms and Psalm 91, and then assess the interpretation of Psalm 91 in early Jewish and Christian literature. At the end of the essay I shall return to the question of Jesus and Psalm 91.

2. THE EXORCISM PSALMS OF QUMRAN

Sandwiched in a cluster of psalms and hymns found in the Great Psalms Scroll from Cave 11 (11Q5), David, son of Jesse and composer of many psalms, is introduced. Among other things, we are told: “And all the songs that he (David) spoke were four hundred and forty-six. And songs to perform over the possessed: four [לנגן על הפגועים ארבעה]” (11Q5 [or 11QPs^a] 27:9–10).¹ As it turns out, we may have actually recovered the “four” psalms to be sung (or performed) over the possessed, to which 11Q5 makes reference.²

These exorcism psalms are found in 11Q11 (or 11QapocrPs). This scroll seems to comprise three extracanonical psalms plus Psalm 91, for four psalms in all.³ The extracanonical compositions are clearly exorcism psalms. Given the Aramaic paraphrase of Psalm 91, later rabbinic understanding of it, and its quotation in the temptation of Jesus, the appearance of Psalm 91 in 11Q11 strongly suggests that this psalm was understood as an exorcism psalm not only at Qumran but among many Jews in the time of Jesus. The targumic and rabbinic understanding of Psalm 91 as an exorcism psalm may well represent late traditions, but these traditions appear to be based on an ancient interpretation, attested in 11Q11, the Q story of the temptation of Jesus, and perhaps also the *Testament of Levi*.

The exorcism psalms of 11Q11 are as follows.⁴

1. Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, vol. 2, 4Q274–11Q31 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 1178–79 [= DSSSE]. See also James A. Sanders, *The Psalms Scroll of Qumrân Cave 11 (11QPs^a)* (DJD 4; Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 48, 92–93.

2. So J. P. M. van der Ploeg, “Un petit rouleau de Psaumes apocryphes (11QPsAp^a),” in *Tradition und Glaube: Das frühe Christentum in seiner Umwelt. Festgabe für Karl Georg Kuhn zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Gert Jeremias, Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn, and Hartmut Stegemann; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 128–39 + pls. ii–vii, here 129; and Émile Puech, “11QPsAp^a: Un rituel d’exorcismes. Essai de reconstruction,” *RevQ* 14 (1990): 377–408, esp. 399–403; idem, “Les deux derniers psaumes davidiques du rituel d’exorcisme 11QPsAp^a iv,4–5,14,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research* (ed. Devorah Dimant and Uriel Rappaport; STDJ 10; Leiden: Brill; Jerusalem: Magnes Press and Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1992), 64–89, esp. 78–89.

3. Peter W. Flint (*The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms* [STDJ 17; Leiden: Brill, 1997], 167) refers to the collection of psalms as a “Davidic Exorcism Handbook.” That 11Q11 comprises four *Davidic* psalms is a plausible conjecture, but it is not certain, given the fragmentary nature of the scroll.

4. For Hebrew text and translation, see James A. Sanders, “A Liturgy for Healing the Stricken,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts with English Translations*, vol. 4A, *Pseudepigraphic and Non-Masoretic Psalms and Prayers* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; PTSDSS 4A; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 216–33; Florentino García Martínez, Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, and A. S. van der Woude, *Qumran*

FIRST EXORCISM PSALM:

“[...] and the one who weeps for him [...] the curse [...] by the Lord [...] dragon [...] the ear[th ...] adjur[ing ...] to [...] this [...]the demon[s ...] he will dwe[ll ...]” (1:1–10 [formerly frg. A, lines 2–11]).

SECOND EXORCISM PSALM:

[To David. Concerning the words of incantation] in the name of [the Lord ... the ac]t of Solomon when he invok[ed the name of the Lord ... the sp]irits and the demons [...]these (are) [the de]mons. And the pr[ince of hosti]lity, [he (is) Belial w]ho [rules] over the dep[ths of dark]ness [... to] magni[fy the Go]d of [...] his people accomplish healing [...upon] your name finds support. And invok[e ...Is]rael. Take strength [...] the heavens [... w]ho separated [... Who are y]ou? [...] the deep[s ...] the earth and a[ll that is in the] earth. Who m[ade ...] and the port[ents ...] earth? The Lord (is) the on[e who] made ev[erything ...] his [...] adjur[ing all the an]gels [...] all the proge[ny ...] who stand in service before [him ... he]avens and [all] the earth [...] who send upon [...ear]th sin and upon every hu[man ...] they know his wondr[ous works] which they cannot [... the Lor]d. If [they] do not [...] from before the Lord [...] to kill a soul [...] the Lord and they will fear that great [... o]ne among you [...] a th[ousand ...] from the servants of the Lor[d ... g]reat [blow] and [...] and] great [...] adjuring [...] and the great by [...] a mighty one and he will pur[sue ...] the whole earth. [...] the G]od of the heavens then [...] the Lord will strike you (with) a [might]y bl[ow] in order to destroy you [...]. And by his burning wrath [he will send] against you a mighty angel [... all his co]mmands which [...] pity against you, wh[o ...] over all those who [will send] you to the great pit [and to] deepest [Sheol], and (far) from the ab[ode ...] will lie down, and darkness [...] forever, and

Cave 11.II: 11Q2–18, 11Q20–31 (DJD 23; Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 181–205 + pls. xxii–xxv; García Martínez and Tigchelaar, *DSSSE 2:1200–1205*; Martin G. Abegg, Peter W. Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible: The Oldest Known Bible Translated for the First Time into English* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 539–42. See also Flint, *Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls and the Book of Psalms*, 246–48. For scholarly discussion of these exorcism psalms, see M. Delcor, “L’utilisation des psaumes contre les mauvais esprits à Qoumran,” in *La vie de la Parole: De l’Ancien au Nouveau Testament. Études d’exégèse et d’herméneutique bibliques offertes à Pierre Grelot* (Paris: Desclée, 1987), 61–70; Puech, “11QPsAp^a: Un rituel d’exorcismes,” 377–408; idem, “Les deux derniers psaumes davidiques . . . 11QPsAp^a iv,4–5,14,” 64–89; idem, “Les psaumes davidiques du rituel d’exorcisme (11Q11),” in *Sapiential, Liturgical and Poetical Texts from Qumran: Proceedings of the Third Meeting of the International Organization for Qumran Studies, Oslo, 1998. Published in Memory of Maurice Baillet* (ed. Daniel K. Falk, Florentino García Martínez, and Eileen M. Schuller; STDJ 35; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 160–81.

[...] with the curse of Abaddon ... by] the burning wrath of the Lord [...] darkness in all ... tribulations [...] your gift [...] the mighty blow [...] righteousness [...] who [...] the stricken [...] volunteers of [...] Raphael will make them whole [...].⁵ (2:1–5:3 [formerly 1:1–4:3])

THIRD EXORCISM PSALM:

A Psalm of David, against [...] in the name of the Lord [...] against Resheph [...] he will come to you at night, and] you will say to him, “Who are you? [Withdraw from] humanity and from the holy race! For your appearance is [nothing], and your horns are horns of sand. You are darkness, not light, [wicked]ness, not righteousness [...] the Lord [...] in Hades most deep, [enclosed in doors] of bronze [...] light and not [...] never again to see] the sun that [shines on the] righteous [...] and then you shall say [...] the righteous to come [...] to do harm to him [...] truth from [...] righteousness to [...]” (5:4–6:3 [formerly 4:4–5:3]).⁶

FOURTH EXORCISM PSALM:

¹ [One who dwells] in the shelter of [the Most High, in the shadow of the Almighty [he lodges.] ² Whoever says [to the Lord, “My refuge] and [my] fortress, [my God (is) my] security in whom [I trust.” ³ For he] will deliver you from [the snare of the fowler, from deadly] pestilence. ⁴ [In] his pinions he will cover [you,] and under his [wing]s you will reside. [His] grace (will be) [for] you a shield and his truth a buckler. Selah. ⁵ You will not be afraid of the terror of the night (or) the arrow that flies (by) day, ⁶ the plague that rages at noon, (or) the pestilence (which) [in darkness] stalks. ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, or ten thousand at your [right, (but) you] it will not] touch. ⁸ Only [look] with your eyes [and you will see] the retribution of the wicked. ⁹ You have [invoked] [your] refuge,] you have [made] (him) your delight. ¹⁰ You will [not] see ... nor shall [misfortune] touch your [tent]s. ¹¹ For he has commanded [...] for you to guard you on] your [ways], ¹² upon (their) palms [they will lift] you up lest [...] your] foot [on a stone], ¹³ (and upon) a serpent [...] you will tread, you will tramp[le ...] and sea monster. ¹⁴ You have [held] fast [...] ¹⁵ ... ¹⁶ ... he will show you [his] salvation [...] And they] shall respond Amen, Amen.] Selah.⁷ (6:4–14 [formerly 5:4–14] = Ps 91:1–16)

5. Translation based on Sanders, “Liturgy for Healing the Stricken,” 221–27.

6. Translation based on Cook, “Songs to Disperse Demons,” in M. O. Wise, M. G. Abegg Jr., and E. M. Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 19), 454.

7. Translation based on Sanders, “Liturgy for Healing the Stricken,” 231–33. The super-

A few brief comments will be helpful. Only a few words and phrases of the first exorcism psalm survive. That it was thought to be Davidic is plausible, but it is only an educated guess. However, the exorcistic orientation of the fragmentary psalm is evident. In line 5 we find the word “sea monster,” “serpent,” or “dragon” (תנין). The word appears in Ps 91:13, where in the RSV it is translated “serpent.” The word “demon” (שד) appears in line 10. In line 7 “adjuring” translates מושביע, a word that usually means “swearing” (as in swearing an oath). In the context of exorcism it probably should be taken in the sense of “adjuring” or “exorcising,” as in 11Q11 3:5 (“adjuring all the angels”) and 4:1 (“adjuring”).

The opening words of the second exorcism psalm are missing. Perhaps it was originally attributed to David. The name of David’s son Solomon—who was well known for his exorcistic skills—appears in line 2. We also find reference to “demons” (שדים) in lines 3 and 4. The reconstruction “prince of hostility” in line 4 is probable. It may also be translated “the Prince of Mastemah” (שר המשטמה), in reference to a malignant spiritual power often mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls. “Belial” (בלעל) is plausibly reconstructed in line 5. As mentioned above, “adjuring” occurs in 3:5 and 4:1. The “thousand” in 3:12 may allude to Ps 91:7, whereas in the rabbinic and targumic traditions it refers to bands of demons. In 4:7 we have “great pit,” in 4:10 “curse of Abaddon” (בקללת האבדון),⁸ and in 5:3 anticipation that “Raphael will make them whole.”⁹

The third exorcism is clearly identified as belonging to David. In the name of the Lord one can speak (or sing) “against” various demons, including Resheph, an ancient deity, understood to be dangerous and punitive, though also benevolent. Israelites, however, regarded him as a demon (as in Deut 32:24; Ps 78:48).¹⁰ The psalm mocks wicked Resheph, asserting in line 7 that his “horns are horns of sand” (קרניד קרני חלום). One is reminded of the beast of Daniel 7, which possessed ten horns and fought against the saints (Dan 7:7–8, 21). The author of the exorcism psalm does not fear the horns of Resheph (cf. Ps 75:10: “All the horns of the wicked he will cut off”). “Satan” could be reconstructed at the end of line 12.

The fourth exorcism psalm is Psalm 91 (that is, in the Masoretic Text, but Psalm 90 in the Greek). There is no attribution in the Hebrew, but in the Greek the psalm is linked to David (τῷ Δαυιδ);¹¹ so also in the Aramaic: “David said, I

scripted numbers refer to the verse numbers of Psalm 91, not to the line numbers of 11Q11 col. 6.

8. See M. Hutter, “Abaddon,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst; rev. ed., Leiden: Brill, 1999), 1 [= DDD]. The root meaning is “destruction” or “place of destruction.” In Rev 9:11 the word appears as a proper name.

9. Raphael is an angel of healing (cf. Tobit). See M. Mach, “Raphael,” DDD, 688.

10. See P. Xella, “Resheph,” DDD, 700–703.

11. A. Pietersma (*The Psalms: A New English Translation of the Septuagint* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 91) renders the opening words αἶνος ᾠδῆς τῷ Δαυιδ: “A Laudation. Of an Ode. Pertaining to David.”

will say to the Lord: ‘My refuge and my fortress’ (v. 2). The content of Psalm 91 readily lends itself to an exorcistic function. Verse 3 promises deliverance from the “deadly pestilence,” while vv. 5-6 promise the faithful person that he will “not be afraid of the terror of the night” or the “plague that rages at noon.” The creatures mentioned in v. 13 (“serpent,” “sea monster,” and the like) were sometimes understood as demonic beings. As already mentioned, the “sea monster” (ܩܝܢܐ) here in v. 13 appears also in line 5 of the first exorcism psalm.¹²

3. PSALM 91 IN ARAMAIC

The Psalms Targum has received relatively little scholarly attention, though in recent years that has begun to change.¹³ In my very preliminary study I suggested a fifth-century date for most of the material in this Targum, though allowing for much later glosses, on the one hand, as well as the presence of much older turns of phrases and exegetical traditions, on the other.¹⁴ In his recently published translation, David Stec suggests “fourth to sixth century” and acknowledges that Targum Psalms probably “contains material belonging to more than one period.”¹⁵ In this I am sure that he is correct. The language of the Targum seems to be a form of Palestinian Aramaic,¹⁶ and it gives evidence here and there of very old interpretive tradition. The exorcistic orientation of Psalm 91 offers an interesting example of this.

12. See the important studies by Hermann Lichtenberger, “Ps 91 und die Exorzismen in 11QPsAp^a,” in *Die Dämonen: Die Dämonologie der israelitischen-jüdischen und frühchristlichen Literatur im Kontext ihrer Umwelt* (ed. Armin Lange, Hermann Lichtenberger, and K. F. Diethard Römheld; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 416–21; idem, “Qumran and the New Testament,” in *The Changing Face of Judaism, Christianity, and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity. Presented to James H. Charlesworth on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (ed. Ian H. Henderson and Gerbern S. Oegema; JSRZ 2; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006), 103–29, esp. 121–26 (“Spirits and Demons in the Dead Sea Scrolls”). For further points of connection between Psalm 91 and the other exorcism psalms of 11Q11, see Lichtenberger, “Qumran and the New Testament,” 123–24.

13. For brief reports of the history of scholarship, complete with bibliography, see Craig A. Evans, “The Aramaic Psalter and the New Testament: Praising the Lord in History and Prophecy,” in *From Prophecy to Testament: The Function of the Old Testament in the New* (ed. Craig A. Evans; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004), 44–91, esp. 44–75; David M. Stec, *The Targum of Psalms: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (ArBib 16; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004), 1–26; and Timothy Edwards, *Exegesis in the Targum of The Psalms: The Old, the New, and the Rewritten* (Gorgias Dissertations 28; Biblical Studies 1; Piscataway N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2007), 1–23. Edwards does not discuss Tg. Psalm 91.

14. Evans, “The Aramaic Psalter and the New Testament,” 70–75.

15. Stec, *Targum of Psalms*, 2.

16. Ibid., 18. See also Edward M. Cook, “The Psalms Targum: Introduction to a New Translation, with Sample Texts,” in *Targum and Scripture: Studies in Aramaic Translations and Interpretations in Memory of Ernest G. Clarke* (ed. Paul V. M. Flesher; Studies in the Aramaic Interpretation of Scripture 2; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 185–201, esp. 186–89.

Angelology and demonology in the Psalms Targum are accentuated.¹⁷ These themes are not absent from the Hebrew Psalter, but they are enhanced and modernized in the Aramaic.¹⁸ Of special interest for the present study is the Targum's paraphrase of vv. 5–10. The passage begins with David's words to his son Solomon:

5. לא תדחל מן דלוחא דמזיקי דאזלין בליליא מן גיררא דמלאך מותא דשרי ביממא:
 6. מן מותא די בקיבלא מהלך מסיעת שידין דמחבלין בטיהרא:
 7. תדכר שמא דקודשא יפלון מן סטר שמאלך אלפא וריבבותא מן ימינד לותך לא יקרבו למונזק:
 8. לחוד בעיינד תהי מסתכל והיך מיתגמרין רשיעי תחמי:
 9. עני שלמה וכן אמר ארום אנת הוא יהוה רוחצני במדור עילאה שויתא בית שכינתך:
 10. אתיב מרי עלמא וכן אמר לא תארע לך בישתא ומכתשא ומזיקיא לא יקרבו במשכנייך:

5. "You will not be afraid of the terror of *the demons that go about in the night*, nor of the arrow of *the angel of death that he shoots* in the daytime,
 6. nor of the *death* that goes about in the darkness, nor of *the company of demons that destroy* at noon.
 7. *You will call to remembrance the Holy Name, and a thousand will fall at your left side, and ten thousand at your right hand; (but) they will not come near you to do harm.*
 8. You will only look with your eyes, and you will see *how the wicked are being destroyed.*"
 9. *Solomon answered, and this is what he said:* "Because you, O Lord, are my refuge, *in the most high dwelling place you have set the house of your Shekinah.*"
 10. *The Lord of the World responded, and this is what he said:* "No evil shall befall you, and no plague *or demons* shall come near your tent."¹⁹

I offer a few comments. Verses 5–8 constitute part of David's instructions to his son Solomon. David's speech begins in v. 2 and includes the assurance in v. 3 that God "will deliver you, Solomon my son, from the trap and the snare, from death and tumult." This assurance anticipates Solomon's response in v. 9 and the Lord's added promise in vv. 10–16. The targumic paraphrase reflects a very old

17. See Stec, *Targum of Psalms*, 6.

18. For several important studies of the general topic, see Lange et al., *Die Dämonen*.

19. Translation based on Stec, *Targum of Psalms*, 175. Words in italics indicate places where the Aramaic differs from the Hebrew.

tradition of Solomon as healer and exorcist par excellence. This tradition was known to Josephus and was greatly embellished in the pseudepigraphal *Testament of Solomon*, a work that probably originated in first-century Jewish circles and was later expanded and enriched in Christian circles. According to Josephus, exorcists in his time made use of spells, incantations, and a special ring thought to derive from Israel's famous monarch. Amulets and magical papyri from later times attest the popularity of Solomon and his ring. More will be said about Solomon's reputation shortly.

The Hebrew's "the terror of the night" in v. 5 becomes in the Targum "the terror of the demons [מזיקין]²⁰ that go about in the night," while "the arrow that flies by day," becomes "the arrow of the angel of death that he shoots in the day(time)." Demons are explicitly referenced elsewhere in Psalm 91 (cf. v. 6: "the company of demons [שידין] that destroy at noon"; v. 10: "no plague or demons [מזיקין] shall come near your tent").²¹ Recall that "demons" (שידין) appeared in the first and second exorcism psalms.²²

In v. 5 the arrow becomes the "angel of death," a malevolent being that appears elsewhere in the Psalms Targum:

What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? (Heb. 89:48 [Eng. 89:49])

Who is the man *who* will live and not see *the angel of death*, who will deliver his soul from *his hand*, and *not go down to his grave* forever? (Tg.)

Let not the slanderer be established in the land; let evil hunt down the violent man speedily! (Heb. 140:11)

The man who speaks with deceitful tongue—they cannot dwell in the land *of the living*; *the angel of death* will hunt down the men of evil rapacity, *he will smite him in Gehenna*. (Tg.)

The association of the angel of death with Gehenna is to be noted. The wicked can expect to be struck down in Gehenna by the angel of death. Demons number among the allies of the angel of death. Accordingly, demons also plague the wicked (cf. Tg. Ps 89:32 [Eng. 89:33]).

20. מזיק, "striker," comes from נזק "to damage."

21. See Stec, *Targum of Psalms*, 6.

22. For more on demons, see G. J. Riley, "Demon," *DDD*, 235–40; M. Mach, "Demons," in the *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam; 2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) [= *EDSS*], 1:189–92; W. Foerster, "δαίμων," κ.τ.λ., *TDNT* 2:1–20, esp. 10–16; *Midr. Pss.* 91.3 (on Ps 91:6). דש, whose root meaning is "destruction," is the more common word for demon in biblical literature. It occurs some fifty times in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Deut 32:17; Ps 106:37), about two dozen times in the scrolls, and about two dozen times in the Targums. Both דש and מזיק are frequently found in rabbinic literature.

In v. 7 the “thousand” that fall at the left hand and the “ten thousand” that fall at the right are probably to be understood as bands of demons. Not only does the context in the Psalms Targum suggest this, but this is how the passage is understood in rabbinic interpretation: “If a thousand demons should come against a man’s left, they will fall before it . . . even if ten thousand demons should come against the right, they will fall before it” (*Midr. Pss.* 91.4 [on Ps 91:7]).²³

At this point it will help to review the exorcism recounted by Josephus. This wily survivor of the great Jewish rebellion tells of one Eleazar, an exorcist who made use of incantations and various items said to be handed down from Solomon. Josephus says:

Now so great was the prudence and wisdom that God granted Solomon, that he surpassed the ancients, and even the Egyptians. . . . And God granted him knowledge of the art used against demons for the benefit and healing of people. 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. And this kind of cure is of very great power among us to this day, for I have seen a certain Eleazar, a countryman of mine, in the presence of Vespasian, his sons, tribunes, and a number of other soldiers, free men possessed by demons, and this was the manner of the cure: he put to the nose of the possessed man a ring that had under its seal one of the roots prescribed by Solomon, and then, as the man smelled it, drew out the demon through his nostrils, and, when the man at once fell down, adjured the demon never to come back into him, speaking the name of Solomon’s name and reciting the incantations that he had composed.²⁴ (*Ant.* 8.45–47)

According to Josephus, Israel’s famous king and patron of wisdom surpassed even the Egyptians. In context Josephus probably had in mind the Egyptians’ fame for magic and exorcism, a reputation that grows out of passages such as Gen 41:8 and Exod 7:11 (cf. Wis 17:7; 18:13) and is exaggerated in later traditions.²⁵ We are told that the Jewish exorcist Eleazar made use of a ring, under whose seal

23. Translation based on William G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms* (2 vols., Yale Judaica Series 13; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 2:103. Interpreting the thousands as referring to demons is probably old tradition; claiming that they fall before the “Commandment of the Tefillin” is a much later idea.

24. Translation based on H. St. John Thackeray and Ralph Marcus, *Josephus* (LCL 281; London: Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934), 595–97. For commentary, see Christopher T. Begg and Paul Spilsbury, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, vol. 5, *Judean Antiquities Books 8–10* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 14–15; Roland Deines, “Josephus, Salomo und die von Gott verliehene τέχνη gegen die Dämonen,” in Lichtenberger et al., *Die Dämonen*, 365–94, esp. 372–92.

25. For examples: *b. Qidd.* 49b: “Ten measures of sorcery descended into the world, Egypt received nine, the rest of the world one”; *b. Šabb.* 104b: “Did not Ben Stada bring spells from Egypt?”; and esp. the *Sepher ha-Razim*. See Mordecai Margalioth, *Book of the Mysteries* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966). Margalioth dates *Sep-*

was a root, and incantations believed to have been composed by Solomon himself. The tradition of Solomon as exorcist and healer begins with 1 Kgs 4:29–34 and was embellished in later traditions such as Wis 7:17–21 and the *Testament of Solomon*. In the latter we are told that an angel gave Solomon a “ring, which had a seal engraved on precious stone” (*T. Sol.* 1:7). No doubt this ring with a seal is the very ring Eleazar claimed to possess. The tradition of the incantations said to have been composed by Solomon grew out of the story, in which the king interrogated a host of demons, learning from them the ills they caused and how the demons could be thwarted (cf. the whole of the *Testament of Solomon*).²⁶ The root that Eleazar had under the seal of the ring is probably the Baaras root described elsewhere in Josephus. This root is said to be flame-colored and to emit a brilliant light, killing anyone who mishandled it: “it possesses one virtue for which it is prized; for the so-called demons . . . are promptly expelled by this root, if merely applied to the patients” (*War* 7.180–86).

Solomon’s fame was widespread in late antiquity, among non-Jews as well as among Jews. It is attested in scores of incantation texts, usually found inscribed on amulets or bowls.²⁷ Many of these incantations are written in Aramaic, Syriac, or Mandaean,²⁸ several of which refer to Solomon, for example:

“Charmed and sealed is all sickness . . . by the seal of King Solomon, son of David.”²⁹

“This is the seal-ring of King Solomon, the son of David. . . . Every demon . . . and all roof howlers, lilis [or liliths], and monsters, and all Satans, and idols, and curses . . . are bound and sealed . . . for all his house and all his dwelling, from this day and forever. Amen, Amen, Selah.”³⁰

her ha-Razim to the third century, but that is probably too early. See also Dennis C. Duling, “Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David,” *HTR* 68 (1975): 235–52.

26. And also the later *Sepher ha-Razim*; see Margalioth, *Book of Mysteries*, 26.

27. See Chester C. McCown, “The Christian Tradition as to the Magical Wisdom of Solomon,” *JPOS* 2 (1922): 1–24; Loren R. Fisher, “Can This Be the Son of David?” in *Jesus and the Historian: Written in Honor of Ernest Cadman Colwell* (ed. F. Thomas Trotter; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 82–97; James H. Charlesworth, “Solomon and Jesus: The Son of David in Ante-Markan Traditions (Mk 10:47),” in *Biblical and Humane: A Festschrift for John F. Priest* (ed. Linda Bennett Elder, David L. Barr, and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon; Scholars Press Homage Series 20; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 125–51.

28. For collections of texts, see James A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur* (Philadelphia: University Museum, 1913); Cyrus H. Gordon, “Aramaic Magical Bowls in the Baghdad Museum,” *AO* 6 (1934): 319–34; Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Aramaic Magic Bowls,” *JAOS* 85 (1965): 511–23; idem, *Mandaic Incantation Texts* (AOS 49; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1967), esp. 153–305 (texts and translations).

29. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur*, 231–32. See also the discussion in Charlesworth, “Solomon and Jesus,” 137–38.

30. Gordon, “Aramaic Magical Bowls,” 322.

“Sealed with the seal-ring of El Shaddai, blessed be He, and with the seal-ring of King Solomon, the son of David, who worked spells on male demons and female liliths.”³¹

Psalm 91 in the Aramaic presupposes this Solomonic, exorcistic tradition and the demonology that went with it. There is abundant evidence of interest in Solomon, son of David, in the first century as exorcist par excellence.

4. JESUS AND PSALM 91

Having established the antiquity of the exorcistic interpretation of Psalm 91, we may inquire in what ways, if any, this understanding of Psalm 91 is reflected in Jesus’ teaching, apart from the temptation narrative itself.

There is one passage that recommends itself. According to Luke 10:17–20, the disciples return from their mission, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” Jesus replies, saying,

I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven [ἐθεώρουν τὸν σατανᾶν ὡς ἀστραπήν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεσόντα]. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions [δῶκα ὑμῖν τὴν ἐξουσίαν τοῦ πατεῖν ἐπάνω ὄφρων καὶ σκορπιῶν], and over all the power of the enemy [ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ ἐχθροῦ]; and nothing shall hurt [οὐ μὴ ἀδικήσῃ] you. (vv. 18–19)

Every significant element in this dominical utterance reflects Jewish demonology. The statement that Satan has fallen from heaven presupposes earlier access to heaven, as in Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7; and Zech 3:1–2. His fall from heaven may allude to Isa 14:12 (“How you are fallen [LXX ἐκπίπτειν] from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn!”), which in the Isaiah Targum seems to be understood as in reference to Satan. According to the *Life of Adam and Eve*, the devil reproaches Adam, “because of you I am expelled and deprived of my glory, which I had in the heavens in the midst of angels, and because of you I was cast out onto the earth” (12:1). Similarly, in *2 Enoch* we are told that God “hurled (Satan) out from the height, together with his angels” (29:5; cf. 31:4).

Jesus’ claim to have given his disciples authority (δῶκα ὑμῖν τὴν ἐξουσίαν)

31. Ibid. For early references to Lilith, usually thought of as a female demon, see 4Q510 frg. 1, line 5 (“all the spirits of the destroying angels, spirits of the bastards, Lilith, howlers and desert dwellers”; the same in 4Q511 frg. 10.1; and *2 Bar.* 10:8 (“I shall call the Sirens from the sea, and you Lilin [or Lilith], come from the desert, and you, demons and dragons from the woods”). The name Lilith also appears in Aramaic incantation bowls; see Cyrus H. Gordon, “Two Magic Bowls in Teheran,” *Or* 20 (1951): 306–15, esp. 310; Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur*, 190. Indeed, Qumran’s 4Q184, which has been called the “Wiles of the Wicked Woman,” is probably not in reference to a mortal woman, but in reference to Lilith herself. So Joseph M. Baumgarten, “On the Nature of the Seductress in 4Q184,” *RevQ* 15 (1991): 133–43, esp. 140.

“to tread upon serpents and scorpions” (τοῦ πατεῖν ἐπάνω ὄφρων καὶ σκορπίων) almost certainly alludes to Ps 91:13: “you will trample down lion and serpent [Old Greek: καταπατήσεις λέοντα καὶ δράκοντα],” a passage that probably underlies the patriarch Levi’s pseudepigraphal prophecy of the coming of a faithful priest. It will be a time when “Beliar shall be bound by him. And he shall grant to his children authority to tread [δώσει ἐξουσίαν τοῖς τέκνοις αὐτοῦ τοῦ πατεῖν] on the wicked spirits” (*T. Levi* 18:12). The author of the *Testament of Levi* has substituted the more literal “wicked spirits” (τὰ πονηρὰ πνεύματα) for “lion and serpent” (λέοντα καὶ δράκοντα), the creatures that oftentimes in demonological contexts represent evil spirits. Other parallels should be mentioned: “Then all the spirits of error shall be given over to being trampled underfoot [πάντα τὰ πνεύματα τῆς πλάνης εἰς καταπάτησιν]. And men will have mastery over the evil spirits” (*T. Sim.* 6:6); and “He will liberate every captive of the sons of men from Beliar, and every spirit of error will be trampled down [πᾶν πνεῦμα πλάνης πατηθήσεται]” (*T. Zeb.* 9:8). The closest parallel to Ps 91:13 is *T. Levi* 18:12, where we have “give authority” and “tread on the wicked spirits.” It is to this language that Jesus alludes.

Joseph Fitzmyer, however, thinks an allusion to Ps 91:13 is “farfetched.”³² He points out that ὄφεις (“serpent,” or “snake”), the word found in Luke 10:19, never renders the דַּרְגִּין (“dragon,” or “sea monster”) in the Old Greek. It must be admitted that the evangelist Luke probably has made no allusion, at least not consciously. If he had, Jesus’ saying would have paralleled the Greek version of the psalm more closely. It is more likely that what lies behind Luke 10:19 is a form of Jesus’ saying that reflects more than simply the wording of Ps 91:13—but an interpretive orientation.

In any event, several words are used in reference to Satan. In Hebrew, v. 13b reads: תַּדְבִּיחַ אֶת־הַיְלֵוֹת וְאֶת־הַנָּחָשׁ (“you will tread upon the young lion and the serpent”), which is rendered literally in the Old Greek: καταπατήσεις λέοντα καὶ δράκοντα. The serpent (ὄφεις) of Gen 3:1–14 is understood as in reference to Satan, as seen in Paul (2 Cor 11:3: “the serpent [ὁ ὄφεις] deceived Eve by his cunning”). Elsewhere Satan (or the devil) is closely associated with the ὄφεις (Greek *Life of Adam and Eve* 16:1–4; 17:4; 18:1; 23:4; 25:1; *Rehobites* 20:3; *4 Macc* 18:8 “snake of deceit [ἀπάτης ὄφεις]). But Satan is also called a δράκων (“dragon,” or “sea monster”), the very word used in Ps 91:13 (= Old Greek Ps 90:13). Indeed, the author of Revelation calls Satan “serpent” (ὄφεις) and “dragon” (δράκων): “And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan [ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφεις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς], the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him” (Rev 12:9; cf. 13:4; 20:2).

Satan is also called a “lion”: “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil

32. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 24A; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 863.

prowls around like a roaring lion [διάβολος ὡς λέων ὠρυόμενος], seeking someone to devour [καταπιεῖν]” (1 Pet 5:8). The allusion could be to Ps 22:13 (“like a ravening and roaring lion”), but 1 Peter may allude to another tradition, one possibly attested in the pseudepigraphal *Joseph and Aseneth*: “For behold, the wild ancient Lion [ὁ λέων ὁ ἄγριος ὁ παλαιός] pursues me; and his children are the gods of the Egyptians that I have cast down and destroyed. And their father the devil is trying to devour me [ὁ πατήρ αὐτῶν ὁ διάβολος καταπιεῖν με πειράται]” (12:9). The “ancient lion” is none other the devil, father of the Egyptian gods, who is trying to devour the repentant Aseneth. In the *Testament of Solomon* there are demons who appear as lions (cf. *T. Sol.* 2:3; 11:1).

Jesus also tells his disciples that he has given them authority ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ ἐχθροῦ (“over all the power of the enemy”). Elsewhere in the dominical tradition the devil is called “the enemy” (cf. Matt 13:28–29: “the enemy who sowed them is the devil [ὁ δὲ ἐχθρὸς ὁ σπείρας αὐτὰ ἐστὶν ὁ διάβολος]). One is reminded, too, of what an angry Paul said to Elymas the magician: “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness [υἱὲ διαβόλου, ἐχθρὲ πάσης δικαιοσύνης], full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?” (Acts 13:10). The devil is called “the enemy” in other Judeo-Christian texts in late antiquity (cf. *Life of Adam and Eve* 2:4; 7:2; 15:1; 25:4; 28:3; 3 *Bar.* 13:2; *T. Dan* 6:2–4). Of great interest is the latter passage, in which reference is made to the “kingdom of the enemy”: “God . . . will stand against the kingdom of the enemy [τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ ἐχθροῦ]. . . the kingdom of the enemy [ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ ἐχθροῦ] will be brought to an end” (*T. Dan* 6:2, 4). This hope coheres with the prediction in the *Testament of Moses*: “Then his (God’s) kingdom will appear throughout his whole creation. Then the devil will have an end. . . For the Heavenly One will arise from his kingly throne” (10:1, 3; cf. Mark 3:26 “And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end”).

Both Jesus’ words in Luke 10:19 and the words attributed to the patriarch in *T. Levi* 18:12 allude to Ps 91:13, a passage that promises that the faithful will tread upon the lion and the serpent underfoot, part of a passage understood as having relevance for exorcism, as we see in 11Q11 and in the Psalms Targum.

The appearance of Psalm 91 in the Matthean and Lukan versions of the temptation of Jesus is but one indication of many that the demonological orientation of this particular psalm in the Psalms Targum derives from early, probably intertestamental tradition. The exorcistic psalms of 11Q11 provide important, early attestation of a tradition that comes to expression in interesting ways in the life and teaching of Jesus.

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