Matthew and Psalms of Solomon’s Messianism: 
A Comparative Study in First-Century Messianology

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The idea that Matthew’s messianism is significantly different from the one found in Ps. Sol. 17 is commonplace. Most often, one will find it stated in almost an axiomatic fashion with a waving of the hand toward the militaristic perspective of Psalms of Solomon as sufficient evidence to make the point. While there can be no doubt that Matthew’s messianism evinces differences from that of Psalms of Solomon’s, such an overly simplistic assessment appreciates neither the number and depth of similarities of perspective between the two messianologies nor their implications. This article will show that Matthew’s messianism stands in close affinity with much in the other expressly Davidic conception of messianism in first-century Judaism, namely, Psalms of Solomon, although representing a new, creative moment in the reception history of biblical expectations related to the Messiah.

Key Words: Psalms of Solomon, Gospel of Matthew, Davidic Messianism

INTRODUCTION

Arguably, there are no two documents that have emerged out of the Judaism of the Second Temple period that could be said to have a more thoroughgoing Davidic messianism than Psalms of Solomon and the Gospel of Matthew. This article enumerates several messianic parallels between the pseudepigraphon and the First Gospel. The parallels are of such a significant number and depth as to suggest a relationship between the two works. Simply put, the messianic parallels reveal a common messianic conception. Furthermore, while differences between the texts do not surprise and are often pointed out, it is the parallels that are much more intriguing and, more significantly, underappreciated. Perhaps in the desire to show how Matthew’s messianism is different, we have undervalued the similarities and have left their implications underdeveloped.
The purpose of this article is to expose several of these lines of similarity in hopes that, on the one hand, scholars will be more cautious in their statements about the differences between *Psalms of Solomon* and early Christian messianism, or better, a messianism among at least one group of early Jewish Christ-believers and, on the other, some will be motivated to investigate further the implications for the messianism of Matthew’s Gospel—particularly the more *this-worldly* and concrete elements of a thoroughly Davidic messianism.¹

This essay will demonstrate that the *Psalms of Solomon* and Matthew’s Gospel in all likelihood share the same messianic perspective by (1) briefly rehearsing the literary context of *Pss. Sol. 17* and (2) cataloging some of the significant messianic parallels.

**Psalms of Solomon 17: A Prayer for Messiah’s Arrival**

*Psalms of Solomon 17* is a prayer of a disenfranchised Jewish community located in or near Jerusalem at the end of the first century B.C.² The Psalm

1. One recent scholar willing to see the similarities between *Psalms of Solomon* and Matthew is Lidija Novakovic, *Messiah, the Healer of the Sick: A Study of Jesus as the Son of David in the Gospel of Matthew* (WUNT 2/170; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). At one point, she writes, “In an astonishing similarity to *Pss. Sol. 17*, Emmanuel points toward God who stands behind Jesus’ activity” (ibid., 73, emphasis added; see also p. 75).


The consensus among scholars is that *Psalms of Solomon* was composed in Jerusalem: “there is little doubt that Jerusalem is the provenance of the *Pss. Sol.*” (Wright, “*Psalms,*” 641). Wright bases his assertion on the following five points: (1) the city is given an unusually prominent position in the psalm; (2) it is the local of many events and descriptions are detailed; (3) Jerusalem is addressed (*Pss. Sol. 11*) and speaks (*Pss. Sol. 1*); (4) it is the seat of the Sanhedrin (*Pss. Sol. 4:1*); and (5) the vices described are particularly urban. Within this Jerusalem context, it seems equally likely that the psalms were brought together for the purpose of synagogue worship [cf. Winninge, *Sinners,* 18; also Kenneth Atkinson, *I Cried to the Lord: A Study of the Psalms of Solomon’s Historical Background and Social Setting* (vol. 84, JSJSup; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 211–20; ibid., “‘Toward a Redating of the *Psalms of Solomon*: Implications for Understanding the Sitz im Leben of an Unknown Jewish Sect,” *JSP* 17 (1998): 109 n. 35]. Scholars think this
can be divided, at least in the form we now possess, into two petitions (see table 1). The two petitions have similar structures that begin with a description of reality—either past and present (petition 1) or future (petition 2). Then, based on these described realities, an appeal to God is

The determination of the date of composition and the sociopolitical setting for Pss. Sol. 17 must rely primarily on internal evidence (see G. Buchanan Gray, “The Psalms of Solomon,” in The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English: With Introductions and Critical Explanatory Notes to the Several Books (ed. R. H. Charles; Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 628; Emil Schürer, The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.—A.D. 135) (vol. 3/1; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 195. It is widely accepted among scholars that because the Greek text in no way alludes to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the translation was completed before A.D. 70. What is more, the similarities between Pss. Sol. 11 and the Greek of Bar 4:36–5:9 have led some scholars to postulate a dependence of Baruch on Psalms of Solomon (Gray, “The Psalms of Solomon,” 628.). If these two assumptions carry any weight, the external evidence places the date for the Greek translation of Psalms of Solomon no later than the end of the first century A.D. (Wright, “Psalms,” 640).

In addition, internal evidence, with its allusions to Jewish national conflicts and references to international events, has lead to a widespread consensus among scholars that the events described by the Psalms of Solomon reflect the time of the invasion of Jerusalem by the Roman conqueror Pompey in 64 B.C. Scholars agree in their estimation that the historical allusions in Pss. Sol. 2 and 8 refer to Pompey’s invasion in 64 B.C. and his subsequent death in 48 B.C. (e.g. Marinus de Jonge, “The Psalms of Solomon,” in Outside the Old Testament (Cambridge Commentaries on Writings of the Jewish and Christian World, 200 B.C. to A.D. 200; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 161; cf. Josephus, Ant. 14:58–79). Furthermore, Pss. Sol. 17 is assumed on this view to be an expanded description of Pompey’s invasion of Jerusalem (e.g., Pomykala, Davodic, 159; Schreiber, Gesalbter und König: Titel und Konzeptionen der königlichen Gesalbtererwartung in frühjüdischen und urchristlichen Schriften, 166 n. 20), thus being interpreted in relation to the earlier references of Pss. Sol. 2 and 8. Consequently, the references in Pss. Sol. 2 and 8 are used as the guide for dating the whole of collection typically before 40 B.C. (e.g. Wright, “Psalms,” 641; Winninge, Sinners, 13; de Jonge, “Psalms of Solomon,” 161). In the consensus reading, Pss. Sol. 17 is thought to describe (1) the succession of the sinful Hasmoneans, (2) their punishment by the hand of Pompey, who was himself a sinner, and (3) from v. 21 onward, the (future) Davidic Messiah, who will remove Pompey and restore Israel to its former glorious state (see Johannes Tromp, “The Sinners and the Lawless in Psalm of Solomon 17,” NovT 35 (1993): 346).


3. The Psalms of Solomon, which was originally composed in Hebrew, is extant in both Greek and Syriac translations. For a discussion on the textual background of the Psalms of Solomon, see Robert R. Hann, The Manuscript History of the Psalms of Solomon (Septuagint and Cognate Studies 13; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), vii, 158; Tromp, “Sinners,” 344–61; Wright, “Psalms,” 639–40.
offered. In this way, the first parts of the two petitions form the basis for the subsequent requests. The entire psalm is enclosed with the confession that the Lord is king forever (17:1, 46). This inclusio signals the theological foundation of the prayer.

**Petition One: Raise Up Our Davidic King!**

(Psalms of Solomon 17:4–25)

After a short introduction (17:1–3) the psalmist, in 17:4–20, makes a case for why God should be motivated to carry out his plea. The appeal in 17:21–25 is based on the fact that God chose David’s descendants and swore to him that they alone would reign over Israel forever (2 Sam 7).

This, however, is not the case in the present historical situation of the author. On the contrary, “sinners” have usurped the throne of David with violence and placed themselves unlawfully in the position of kingly authority (17:6). By this action, they have not glorified the Lord’s name, but instead have sought to glorify themselves. In response to this, the psalmist acknowledges that God is already at work preparing to eradicate these sinners in his wrath by means of a “man foreign to our race” (17:7–9), who is also called a “Lawless One” (ὁ ἄνομος) (17:11).

What is more, in the process of eliminating the usurpers of the Davidic throne, the Lawless One devastated Jerusalem and the land (17:11a). Although acting as God’s agent of judgment by expelling the rulers of the land and not sparing any—even destroying the young and the old (17:11b–12), the Lawless One was arrogant (17:13). In addition, by acting as a foreigner he introduced pagan practices and led the people of Jerusalem to perform them to an extent beyond even the pagans themselves (17:13–15).

He caused “the lovers of the synagogue of

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4. See Atkinson, Cried, 135.
6. The meaning of the Greek is difficult here; καί ἐπεκράτωσαν αὐτῶν οἱ ἱδίοι τῆς ἀδικίας could be translated as either “the sons of the covenant got mastery over the practices” (cf. Wright, “Psalms,” 666) or, as is translated here, “the sons of the covenant surpassed the Gentiles” (cf. Ryle and James, Psalms, 135; Holm-Nielsen, Psalmen Salomos, 100. For a similar statement to the latter cf. Pss. Sol. 8:13: “There was no sin they left undone in which they did not surpass (ἡν οὐκ ἐποίησαν ὑπὲρ) the gentiles.”
the holy” to flee to the desert for safety, scattering them over the whole land (17:16–18a). Even nature responded to the desolation and injustice by withholding rain and stopping up the springs (17:18b–19). The ultimate result of the leadership of the Lawless One was that no one in all of Jerusalem from the least to the greatest practiced righteousness or justice; all were disobedient and no one practiced truth (17:15b, 20).

On the basis of this state of affairs, the author demands that God turn his attention to Israel (17:21a) and raise up the promised Davidic king to reign over Israel (17:21b, c). Moreover, the psalmist exhorts God to endow the Davidic king with strength in order to accomplish eight tasks (17:22–25). These tasks are related to the purification of the land through the removal of both the Gentile rulers and the sinners of their own nation who have joined in the ranks of the unrighteous. Of the eight tasks, four are directed against pagan invaders and rulers, and four are aimed at an illegitimate Jewish leadership. The goal of the author’s demand seems to be the establishment of an independent, purified Jewish political state under the authority of the Davidic king.

*Petition Two: Raise Him Up Now!* (Psalms of Solomon 17:26–45)

The second petition of Pss. Sol. 17, like the first, begins with a description of a reality. In this section, however, the reality is not the historical past and present but the supposed future state of the restored kingdom of Israel that will come about as a consequence of the advent of the Davidic king. The nature of his person and the quality of his reign is described progressively in six discrete units: the Davidic king will powerfully lead the Lord’s flock by (1) gathering and reconstituting the sanctified tribes of Israel in the land (17:26–28), (2) judging the nations from the glorious restored city of Jerusalem (17:29–31), (3) governing Jew and non-Jew righteously by remaining faithful to the covenant stipulations (17:32–34a), (4) showing mercy to the nations and blessing Israel (17:34b-36), (5) being invincible against every foe because of his faith in Yahweh, and (6) shepherding impartially so that none are oppressed (17:40–41). The final segment is a climactic statement of the majesty of the kingdom of the Messiah (17:42–44). Based on this vision of a blessed future with the kingdom restored and the new Davidic as its king, the author urges God to bring his mercy to Israel quickly (that

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7. The petition begins with 3 imperatives: ἴδε, ἀνάστησον, and ὑπόζωσον. The last of them is modified by 8 purpose infinitives: θραῦσαι, καθαρίσαι, ἐξῶσαι, ἐκτρῖψαι, συντρῖψαι, ὀλεθρεύσαι, φυγεῖν, and ἐλέγξαι; see also Schreiber, Gesalbter, 170; Winninge, *Sinners*, 92; Waschke, “Richte,” 38, for a similar structural observation.


9. Davenport (Davenport, “Anointed,” 74) rightly observes, “the focus of this section is not upon the personal qualities and characteristics of the king for their own sake, but the actions which these facilitate.”
is, raise up this Davidide) and to deliver Israel from the uncleanness of the enemy (17:45).

PARALLELS BETWEEN PSALMS OF SOLOMON 17 AND MATTHEW’S MESSIANISM

Having briefly oriented the reader to the literary context of the Pss. Sol. 17, the study will now progress to an investigation of some of the messianic parallels evident between Pss. Sol. 17 and Matthew’s Gospel. The following list is not exhaustive, and other parallels could have been pursued; however, the list provides enough evidence, it seems to me, to call in to question the view, characteristic of most, that Matthew’s messianism is significantly different from that of Pss. Sol. 17. What is more, the argument is cumulative. Some of the parallels will no doubt be deemed common place, part and parcel of Judaism in the late Second Temple period and, thus, not unique to Matthew and Psalms of Solomon. However, the cluster of parallels taken as a whole makes the case that the connection is deeper than simply a common Jewish matrix. Matthew’s uniqueness vis-à-vis Psalms of Solomon must then be tempered by the evident affinity.

The Messianic Shepherd-King and His Flock

Pss. Sol. 17:26–44 and Matthew’s Gospel make significant use of the messianic Shepherd-King motif. The messianic Shepherd-King motif appears explicitly in Pss. Sol. 17:40:

He will be mighty in works and powerful in the fear of God, when he shepherds the Lord’s flock in faithfulness and righteousness, thus he will not let any among them be weak in their pasture.

A careful study of the context reveals that this motif provides the framework around which the Messiah’s activities described in Pss. Sol. 17:26–44 are to be understood. Although no explicit reference to the Messianic Shepherd-King motif can be found in the psalm until 17:40, this motif should be understood to encapsulate the whole of the description for at least four reasons.

First, the language at the outset and the conclusion of the description in 17:26, 41–44 sets the discussion of the kingship of the future Davidic king in language of shepherding. Second, the “argument section” of the petition (17:26–44) possesses a progressive structure. In this section, the author uses six discrete units of thought in his description of the future Davidic king, and each of these units builds progressively on the other as the argument moves toward the climatic exhortation (17:45). Thus, the use of the messianic Shepherd-King motif comes at a crucial point in the argument.10

10. In summarizing the section, Nickelsburg (Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah [Philadelphia: Fortress, 2005], 243) notices this progression when he writes, “he [messianic king] will reign in Israel as ruler, judge and shepherd of the flock of the Lord.”
Third, mighty and powerful works along with the qualities of faithfulness and righteousness associated with his shepherding activity in 17:40 are merely a summation of points made earlier. Fourth, Schreiber is certainly correct when he states that the term king is the central description of the anointed figure: “zentrale Bezeichnung der Gesalbtengestalt in PsSal 17.” What’s more, Schreiber implies that in Pss. Sol. 17:40 the description of the kingship of the anointed one (17:26–44), which is encapsulated in 17:26–44, is summed up by the commonly used shepherd motif.

Thus, the messianic Shepherd-King motif provided for this late first-century B.C. community a framework under which various eschatological expectations—both Davidic and non-Davidic—related to the restoration of Israel’s kingdom could be joined together, and its own self identity as the true Israel could be established, reinforced, and expanded.

In portraying Jesus as Israel’s Messiah, Matthew also found the messianic Shepherd-King motif useful. Elsewhere, I have thoroughly defined this motif and have shown that it was an essential element in Matthew’s presentation of Jesus as the Davidic Messiah. I simply refer readers there for further discussion.

The Messianic Designation “Son of David”

The phrase son of David is used in Pss. Sol. 17:21 and nine times in Matthew’s Gospel (e.g. 1:1, 20; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9, 15) to designate the Messiah. For both authors, the phrase is used to stress the Davidic ancestry of the royal Messiah. Pss. Sol. 17:21 is a petition of the psalmist for God to “notice” Israel’s condition and “[to] raise up for them their king, the son of David, at the time which you have chosen.” This use of the designation son of David is “the first clear, extant attestation of the phrase being so applied.” N. Perrin points out that, although the phrase, according to some, had not become a title until the first century A.D., it “must at least have been understood as one of the complex images and terms associated with the Davidic messianic tradition.” What is more, Perrin rightly critiques the view that “the phrase ‘son of David’ in its pre-Christian usage refers to Solomon only in his capacity as exorcist or healer” and insists with K. Berger that “the

11. Schreiber, Gesalbter, 179; elsewhere (ibid., 188) he states, “Entsprechend wird er in PsSal 17 als ἐμφάσις betitelt.”
application of the title Son of David was not restricted to healings, but was part of a broader tradition in which wisdom, exorcism, prophecy, kingship, and God’s sonship stood in close relation to one another.”

Matthew places the phrase in the first line of the Gospel: “The book of the origins of Jesus the Christ, son of David, son of Abraham.” Although more will be said below about the denomination son of David, son of Abraham with respect to the sociopolitical situation, here it should be stressed that the opening two chapters of Matthew, along with the other places where the phrase appears, intend to demonstrate that Jesus is the royal Messiah. A distinction between the two uses of the phrase is evident, however: Psalms of Solomon is written in anticipation of the coming of the Davidic Messiah, while Matthew is claiming that this Messiah has arrived in the person of Jesus.

The Messianic First-Century Sociopolitical and Religious Critique

Both Pss. Sol. 17 and Matthew’s Gospel, through their visions of the messianic kingdom, offer a critique of the Roman political establishment with its client-king. R. Horsley has rightly noted that talk of a new empire bears with it both judgment and hope. To speak of a new empire is to pass judgment on the present. With respect to Pss. Sol. 17, it is enough to refer to the literary contextual discussion above and the situation that precipitated the petition by the psalmist for God’s intervention. In light of the difficulties created by the sin of the non-Davidic Hasmonean leadership, the “lawless one,” also known as the “man foreign to our race,” and the corrupt priesthood (cf. 2:3–5; 8:11–13), the psalmist pleads for God to send his Messiah and deliver the people and the land. While he believes that Herod the Great was God’s agent of judgment against the sinners of Jerusalem, now the author wishes to see him removed because he has made the situation worse by his brutal treatment of the people, and he has polluted the city to an even greater degree. Herod, then, along with the non-Davidic Hasmonean rulers, is the Messiah’s foil: Messiah is everything that Herod is not.


19. This figure could arguably be Pompey; see below for a discussion of Herod the Great in Pss. Sol. 17.

20. Cf. Atkinson, Psalms of Solomon, 376–77; Atkinson ties the dramatic rise of Messianic expectation in the late first century B.C. and early first century A.D., which is visible in docu-
The sociopolitical critique appears in Matthew’s Gospel in the very opening line: “the book of the origin of Jesus the Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham.” Here, Matthew is possibly reflecting the critique of the non-Davidic rulers of Israel and particularly the Herodian dynasty by emphasizing that Jesus is the only legitimate king of Israel. Not only is he a legitimate son of the Patriarchs (that is, son of Abraham), but also he is a Davidic son (that is, son of David). Here, as in the Psalms of Solomon, Jesus the Messiah is everything Herod, and his Roman political power, is not.

This theme can be seen throughout the Gospel but especially in the first four chapters, where Jesus’ arch nemesis is the Herodian dynasty. Matthew, in the infancy narrative unique to his Gospel, emphasizes the confrontation of Jesus with the current “king” of Israel (2:1–18). In addition, Joseph withdraws to the region of Galilee upon returning to the land of Israel after Herod’s death because of fear of Archelaus, Herod’s son (2:22). Then again, we are told by Matthew that Jesus withdrew to Galilee upon hearing of John the Baptist’s arrest by Herod Antipas (4:12). A further reference to Jesus’ withdrawing from the Herodian dynasty is made in Matthew 14:13 after Jesus is informed of the death of John by Herod Antipas.

Although Matthew’s focus moves beyond the Herodian dynasty, the Gospel in its pronouncement of Jesus’ identity as the “King of the Jews” (2:2, 27:37) stands over against the Roman Empire embodied by the local client political figures of the Herodian dynasty and Pontus Pilate. At the same time, it is also a critique of the religious leadership of Israel who have joined in with the illegitimate political establishment and have become equally corrupt and hypocritical (cf. Matt 23; Pss. Sol. 4:1–8).

“Blessed Are Those Who See the Messianic Age”

A similar beatitude regarding those who see the Messianic Age appears in both documents. In Pss. Sol. 17:44 (cf. 18:6), the Psalmist blesses the future generation who will be alive to experience the eschatological restoration of the kingdom of Israel and its Davidic king. He writes:

Blessed will be those who are born in those days
to see the good fortune of Israel, the gathering of the tribes,
which God will do.

This beatitude is reflected in Matthew’s blessing of the disciples in 13:16:

But blessed are your eyes, for they see,
and your ears, for they hear.

21 The term ἀναχωρέω is used by Matthew to signify flight from danger. It is often used of Jesus fleeing from the Herodian dynasty (e.g. 2:14, 22; 4:12, 14:13); cf. also Davies and Allison, Matthew, 1:376.

The primary difference between these two texts is perspective, although Matthew uniquely adds the sense of hearing to the beatitude.23 On the one hand, the Psalms of Solomon text pleads for God’s visitation to the earth on behalf of Israel. This is the essence of his prayer: the psalmist is convinced of the glorious future God will procure for Israel and he, in light of his present desperate situation, wishes that God would send Messiah now and inaugurate the Messianic Age. The beatitude in Matthew’s Gospel, on the other hand, is a declaration of the arrival of this long awaited era. Jesus tells his disciples that they are to be congratulated (μακάριοι); they are experiencing the age of Messiah now.24

R. Beaton has recently suggested the possibility that Matthew was dependent upon Psalms of Solomon for this beatitude given the “striking similarities” between the two texts.25 However, he is quick to qualify his suggestion by stating “whether Matthew had access to or used these texts is pure speculation.”26 Although an argument for the dependency of Matthew on Psalms of Solomon may be “pure speculation,” this article seeks to show that an argument for the historical and theological continuity between the two is not.

Wisdom and the Davidic Messiah

Davidic Messiah traditions are meshed with notions of wisdom in both the Pss. Sol. 17 and Matthew’s Gospel. This merging of Davidic and wisdom traditions is the subject of the next two parallels. While below we will address the more specific topic of the messianic yoke and its political and wisdom connotations, here the more general observation will be made that the presentation of the Messiah in both the Psalms of Solomon and Matthew has been influenced by the sapiential traditions.

Every aspect of the king’s character and function is shaped by wisdom traditions: he expels sinners with “wisdom and righteousness” (Pss. Sol. 17:23); he destroys Gentile lawlessness with a “word of his mouth” (Pss. Sol. 17:24); he will know who are the sons of God (Pss. Sol. 17:27); he will judge the peoples and nation in the “wisdom of his righteousness” (Pss. Sol. 17:29); he will strike the earth with the “word of his mouth” (Pss. Sol. 17:35); he will bless the people “in wisdom” (Pss. Sol. 17:35); he will remove sinners by “the strength of his word” (Pss. Sol. 17:36); he will be made “wise by the counsel of understanding” (Pss. Sol. 17:37); and “he will instruct” the house of Israel “by having his words purified” and “his words will be as the words of the holy ones” (Pss. Sol. 17:42–43). So foundational is wisdom to the psalmist’s picture that B. Mack is indeed right to state: “Take wisdom

23. See Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:396.
24. Ibid., 394.
out of the picture and everything falls apart.” 27 What is more, he suggests that the notion of wisdom employed here is “mythologically conceived, that of her universal reign. This reign can be imagined as her own. Or it can be imagined as that of the king she blesses and exalts (cf. e.g. Wisd. of Sol. 7–9).” 28 This observation is important because it reveals the amalgamation of the traditions related to the future reign of the Davidic king and that of wisdom’s governance. According to the author, the future Davidic king and wisdom are one and the same thing.29

Although there has been debate over the degree to which the notion of wisdom has influenced Matthew’s Gospel, it is recognised that the theme is important to Matthew.30 Recently, B. Witherington has gone so far as to present a “complete sapiential reading of the entire Gospel.” 31 One of the most significant passages for any discussion of wisdom traditions in Matthew is Matt 11:25–30. 32 Within the context of a Gospel that has established Jesus as the Davidic Messiah, his messianic activities (11:2) are used in 11:19 as verification of his identity as “Wisdom.” From Matthew’s perspective the ἔργα of wisdom are the ἔργα of Messiah.33

**Messianic “Yoke”**

The merging of the traditions of the Davidic king and the reign of wisdom is perhaps most clearly visible in the motif of the “messianic yoke.” A reference to the yoke of the Messiah in the context of wisdom language appears in both documents. And, although the emphasis is placed differently, the term “yoke” in both connotes the political governance of the Messiah over Israel and the nations.

In Pss. Sol. 17:29–31 the author characterises the execution of the Messiah’s government over the Gentiles with two clauses. The first describes the nature of his reign with the phrase “the wisdom of his righteousness.”

28. Ibid.
The second depicts his regime with the term yoke (ὑπὸ τὸν αὐτοῦ). The messianic yoke mentioned in the context of wisdom reveals that “wisdom and wisdom’s king rule by instructing.” Thus, to rule by wisdom is no less political. The sense of the phrase is confirmed by the immediate context of the psalm. The immediate context is political, and “his yoke,” then, must be understood as his sovereign governing authority, under which the Gentiles willingly place themselves. The phrase is also used in Pss. Sol. 7:9, where the people of Israel are said to be “under your [God’s] yoke” forever. As in 17:30, ζυγὸς connotes political sovereignty over Israel and implies protection from enemies, direction, discipline and compassion.

Matthew 11:28–30, which is considered “the most significant wisdom statement in the work,” records Jesus as saying: “Come to me all who are wearied and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls; because my yoke is pleasing and my burden is light.” This passage, as many have observed, has an obvious parallel to the

35. Cf. John Nolland, “A Fresh Look at Acts 15:10,” NTS 27 (1980): 111: “When a Jewish writer spoke of the law as ‘the yoke of the kingdom of heaven,’ he spoke of an obligation to which one gladly committed oneself. . . . The imagery of yoke cannot be used without suggesting that there is constraint imposed, hard work required, obligation undertaken, etc., but it frequently escapes any sense that the yoke is a undesirable thing” (emphasis added).
36. This interpretation is confirmed by the use of ζυγὸς in the LXX [cf. Georg Bertram, “ζυγὸς,” TDNT 2:896–98]. The word has a literal and figurative meaning. With respect to the former, ζυγὸς can refer to “scales” or “yoke” in both a secular and ethical sense (Bertram, ζυγὸς, 896). On the other hand, the figurative meaning of the word is found in a few poetic-wisdom contexts—such as Sir 6:30 (Bertram, ζυγὸς, 896–97), but the overwhelming use is in the political sphere. And it is on these latter contexts that the use of ζυγὸς is paralleled here in Psalms of Solomon In these contexts, ζυγὸς can refer to the political sovereignty over Israel of either foreign nations or of YHWH (cf. Bertram, ζυγὸς, 897–98). I disagree with Bertram’s categorization of the figurative meaning of ζυγὸς. He has a category that he labelled “the political sphere of domestic tyranny” and another he called a “theological sense.” Although he is correct to observe that the references that he gathers in support of these categories refer on the one hand to foreign nations and on the other to YHWH, this is in fact a false dichotomy. Both sets of references should be categorized as political: the political sovereignty over Israel of foreign powers and of YHWH. What is more, it is within this latter, political sphere that references to the “yoke of Torah” should be understood (cf. m. Abot 3:5; m. Ber. 2:2), although often they are discussed without reference to the political connotation (cf. Davies and Allison, Matthew 2:289–90).

This political nuance of ζυγὸς is further substantiated by observing that the recitation of the shema was called accepting “the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven” in rabbinc literature (cf. George W. Buchanan, The Consequences of the Covenant [Leiden: Brill, 1970], 66). Buchanan points out that rabbis said that the one who separated himself from sin, meaning that he observed rules such as dietary laws, took upon himself, the Kingdom of Heaven. In this way, Israelites could remain faithful to the government of the Kingdom of Heaven in spite of the concrete absence of it in Jerusalem in the Land of Palestine (ibid., 67). Buchanan further remarks that Jews who took up this yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven “comprised a subversive force against any ‘wicked’ which controlled Palestine” (ibid.). For a list of references in the rabbinc literature about “yoke”, see H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (6 vols.; Munich: Beck, 1922), 2:608–10.

37. Kampen, Wisdom, 227; Witherington, Matthew, 239.
wisdom imagery of Sir 51:23–27 (included here to illuminate further the comparison between Matthew and Psalms of Solomon). Yet, what differentiates Matthew from the author of Sirach, in addition to the identification as personified wisdom, is the intermingling of Davidic and wisdom traditions as in Psalms of Solomon. Matthew’s Jesus is the legitimate Davidic king, the personification of Wisdom who calls upon Israel, those who are “weary” (κοιτιῶντες) and “burdened” (πεφοπτισμένοι), to place themselves under his political authority as the wisdom-king of God’s kingdom. This political authority is shaped by the wisdom tradition and takes the form of “instruction.” Yet this should not be assumed to denote some nonpolitical governance. With the wisdom tradition attached to it, Davidic kingship does not become a nonpolitical entity: Davidic kingship is a political authority that is completely righteous and just, exercised through the power of God. Matthew’s Jesus promises that the kingdom over which he rules is nothing short of the longed-for eschatological rest for the people of God.

**Purification of the People and the Land by Messiah**

The Psalms of Solomon and the Gospel of Matthew both assert that the initial and primary work of Messiah is redemptive and salvific, all the while maintaining this to be the means of bringing about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. The Psalms of Solomon make clear that the poor condition of Israel as a political entity is precipitated by the spiritual condition of the people (Pss. Sol. 17:5). For this reason, B. Embry suggests that the psalms reflect the “prophetic paradigm” in which God punishes the sins of Israel through exile and death, but restores his people when they repent. The present negative condition of Israel (Pss. Sol. 17:5–20), then, is a position from which the author expects redemption. However, according to the psalmist, God’s direct intervention through the Messiah is the only hope for the purification necessary for the restoration of the kingdom (Pss. Sol. 17:21–45). Embry concludes, “the Messiah is a political figure who is the coup de grâce in the author’s future hope for the purification of Israel.” Purity is paramount for the author of the Psalms of Solomon, and it was the “requisite for the establishment of God’s kingdom.”

39. See Witherington’s discussion of the Matthean Jesus’ unique use of the wisdom tradition (Witherington, Matthew, 239–40).
40. Cf. also Matt 9:36 for a similar description of the condition of Israel.
43. Embry, “Psalms” 133. However, the central concern of the document, in contrast to Embry’s view, is political: the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Doubtless, purification is central to that interest as it is a necessary precursor for redemption, but purification falls within the larger concern for the re-establishment of the kingdom for Israel. The kingdom of Israel is the visible manifestation that God is “king over the heavens” (2:30; cf. 17:1, 46) and it is this kingdom for which the author longs. This concern is born out even in the manner in
Solomon, the restoration of the kingdom to Israel and its subsequent positive implications for the reverent Gentiles is dependent on the purification of the people and the land. The author asserts in Pss. Sol. 17:30–31 that the Davidic king will glorify the Lord in Jerusalem before the watching world by cleansing Jerusalem and making it holy again. In addition, because of this purifying activity of the Davidic king, the nations will make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

With the programmatic statement of Matt 1:21, the Gospel writer makes clear his understanding of the mission of Jesus for Israel: “For he will save his people from their sins.” What is more, the “prophetic paradigm” observed in Psalms of Solomon is also foundational to Matthew’s presentation. This can be seen in Matthew’s formation of his genealogy of Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel. He structures the genealogy to emphasize the coming of the Messiah at the end of the era of exile (1:17).44

The Messiah’s mission to purify Israel is also reflected in his healing ministry as well as in the Passion. In the narrative of the healing of the paralytic in Matt 9:1–5, Matthew makes the forgiveness of sins a preeminent concern over against the physical restoration of the body. In this interchange with the religious leaders Jesus testifies that he has been given the authority to forgive sins: “‘But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins’—he said to the paralytic, ‘Get up, take up your bed and go home.’”

Likewise, in the Lord’s Supper pericope, Matthew recounts Jesus’ words when he presented the cup to the disciples: “He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, ‘All of you drink it; for this is my blood of the Covenant, which is poured out on behalf of the many, for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, from now I shall not drink of this fruit of the vine till that day when I drink it new with you in the Kingdom of my Father.’” (Matt. 26:28–29). Here, Matthew’s Jesus links the forgiveness of sins, which the shedding of his blood procures, with the arrival of the Kingdom of God. It appears that Matthew believes that the initial and primary work of Messiah is the purification of Israel from sin, although this is in the service of bringing about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel.45

Another place this purifying work of Jesus is seen in Matthew’s Gospel is in Jesus’ symbolic act in the temple in Matt 21:12–13. Davies and Allison are right to caution interpreters against positing a false either/or with respect to the symbolic act of Jesus.46 Most scholars argue that either Jesus’ action in the temple was a sign of the destruction of the temple or it was a protest against its abuses. It is likely, however, that Matthew’s Jesus

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45. Cf. also Davies and Allison (Matthew, 1:174.) who write, “The Messiah’s first task is to save his people from their sins, not deliver them from political bondage.”

46. Ibid., 3:136.
intends both here. This would be consistent with Jewish tradition, which joined together “protestation against abuses and symbolic expression of judgment.” Matthew conveys through the narrative that the Jerusalem temple is corrupt: it is no longer performing its divinely intended function. Consequently, it will be judged, and this judgment will result in a purification of sorts: either replacement of the temple with something else or the building of a new temple.

**Ambivalence Regarding the Jerusalem Temple in the Messianic Age**

There exists in both documents a similar ambivalence concerning the future of the Jerusalem temple after the restoration of Israel. In Psalms of Solomon, there is very little mention of the temple except for the corruption that it has experienced both by the invading Gentile leaders and corrupt Jewish religious leadership (cf. 2:3–5, 8:11–13). There is even a hint that the group responsible for the document has boycotted the temple and has replaced the sacrificial system with another form of atonement (Pss. Sol. 3:8). Embry has contested the view that the author has abandoned the temple by showing that the desire for a purified temple underlies the whole document. However, in Pss. Sol. 17:30–31, the glory that the nations will behold is the Messiah’s. There is no mention of the temple here; rather, it seems that with the advent of the Messiah, the glory of the Lord that once resided in the temple is now residing in the Messiah. There are, however, no explicit statements about the future temple in the messianic age, and it would be inappropriate to draw any conclusions from the silence. The interest here is focused almost exclusively on the political realm and not on the priesthood.

The Gospel of Matthew is equally ambivalent about the temple in the future messianic age. Generally speaking, Matthew, through his narrative, showed a respect for the temple and its role in the life of the Jew. It was a house of prayer (21:13), a place for offering sacrifices (5:23–24), and a holy site sanctifying the objects within it (23:16–22). But Matthew does believe that the corruption of the priests and others (21:13, 23:35) and the rejection of Jesus (21:42–43, 22:7) will bring about its divinely ordained destruction (24:2). Thus, while it is clear that Matthew believed that the

47. Ibid., 3:136–37, 143.
51. Ibid.
Second Temple would be destroyed, it is not clear what he thought about the temple’s future.

It may be of importance that he later records, through the accusations of the witnesses against Jesus and the mockers at the foot of the cross, that Jesus said he was able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (26:61; 27:40). These accusations are not repudiated by Matthew and are taken to be accurate descriptions of Jesus’ words, although offered by his adversaries. Yet, whether with these statements Matthew hints at an expectation of the rebuilding of the temple in the future Messianic Age is difficult to determine. In favour of this possibility, however, is the fact that Matthew does not make explicit an identification of the temple with himself or the church.52

Jerusalem as a Center of Messianic Activity

The city of Jerusalem figures largely in the eschatological visions of both Psalms of Solomon and Matthew’s Gospel. In Pss. Sol. 17, the Messiah is prayed for to come and cleanse Jerusalem of the Gentile rulers and the unrighteous Jewish leadership (17:22–25). Moreover, having cleansed Jerusalem, the future king will restore the glory of Jerusalem, establishing it not only as the seat of his universal government but also as the center for the visual apprehension of the glory of God by the nations. Jerusalem, then, plays a significant role in the future activity of the Davidic king for two reasons. First, it is the seat of his universal government (17:29–30a), and second, Jerusalem is made the one place in the whole world where the glory of God is visibly and tangibly seen and savored (17:30b–31).

The importance of Jerusalem for Matthew’s messianic vision is hinted at in the early part of the Gospel, although it does not take center stage in the narrative until ch. 21. In 2:2–3, Jerusalem is linked with Herod the Great. Matthew tells his readers that, upon hearing about the “newborn king of the Jews,” Herod and “all Jerusalem” were troubled by the news. At this early stage, it becomes clear, although only implicitly, that there is something wrong in Jerusalem, because those who should have recognized the legitimate king and sought him out are instead remaining loyal to the illegitimate king. While most of the Gospel takes place outside Jerusalem in the northern part of the promised land, Jerusalem is the place where the most significant messianic activity takes place. In chs. 21–28, key messianic events in Jerusalem are recounted: Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (21:1–11), the temple cleansing (21:12–17), the confrontation with Jerusalem’s religious leaders and the lament over Jerusalem (21:23–23:37), the eschatological discourse (24:1–25:46), the Last Supper (26:17–46), the betrayal, arrest, and

52. It is noteworthy that Matthew omits Mark’s phrase “not made with hands” in his depiction of the statements of Jesus’ accusers (cf. Mark 14:58). This phrase is usually considered to be a reference to the Christian community (cf. Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:628).

Matthew’s Gospel does not envisage Jerusalem’s future as do the *Psalms of Solomon*. It could be assumed from a reading of the lament over Jerusalem in Matt 23:38–39 that there is no future for the city of Jerusalem according to Matthew. This very assumption has in fact become the scholarly consensus: 23:38–39 records God’s definite rejection of Israel.\(^{54}\) However, it is contended here, with Davies and Allison, that 23:39 (“For I tell you, from now you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who is coming in the name of the Lord.’”) should be read not as a condemnation but as a promise of the future redemption for Jerusalem.\(^{55}\)

**The Reconstitution of the Twelve Tribes of Israel by Messiah**

The *Psalms of Solomon* and Matthew’s Gospel envisage an ingathering of Israel, a redistribution of the Land to the tribes and the exercise of judgment over the twelve tribes of Israel. In *Pss. Sol.* 17:26–28, following on the heels of the hoped-for purifying activity of the Davidic king (17:21–25), the author of the psalm envisages the future Davidic king reconstituting the twelve tribes of Israel in the land of Israel:

> And he will gather the holy people, in order that he might lead them in righteousness, that is he will judge the tribes of the people who are sanctified by the Lord his God. He will not allow unrighteousness to stay even one night in their midst, and any person who knows wickedness will not dwell with them. For he will know them that all are sons of their God. And he will distribute them in their tribes upon the land, that is the alien and the foreigner will no longer live with them.

The task of reconstituting is made up of two interrelated activities: gathering and redistributing. These two tasks are in sequential order because a redistributing of the land to the tribes presupposes regathering them back into the land. Interestingly, the author of the *Pss. Sol.* 17 coalesces these distinct roles of YHWH and the Davidic Messiah evident in the prophetic visions of restoration in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In this new context, the Davidic messiah now takes the role of both gatherer and governor of Israel. However, from the author’s perspective, this is no contradiction, because he happily believes that it is God, by means of the messianic Davidic king, who will accomplish these tasks: the work is at one and the same time the Messiah’s and YHWH’s.\(^{56}\) This conviction is made explicit in 17:44: “Blessed

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\(^{55}\) Ibid., 323–24.

\(^{56}\) Contra Schüpphaus (Schüpphaus, *Die Psalmen Salomos*, 80), who understands these two points as competing *Gedankengänge* and, thus, asserts “die PsSal [sind] jetzt durchgängig von im wesentlichen zwei verschieden Blickrichtungen beherrscht und damit von zwei unterschiedlichen Themenkreisen geprägt.” G. W. Buchanan (*Jesus, the King and His Kingdom* [Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984], 22), however, points out that in Jewish literature in the postbiblical period thinkers were quite comfortable with a complementary view of the kingdom.
will be those who are born in those days, in order to see the good of Israel in the gathering of the tribes, which God will do.”

Matthew’s Gospel also contains a conviction concerning the territorial restoration of Israel and the reconstitution of the twelve tribes in the Land. The conviction appears throughout the Gospel in various contexts. One often-overlooked narrative element that may reveal an expectation of territorial restoration in Matthew’s Gospel is the emphasis he places on Jesus’ ministry in the northern part of the ideal land of Israel. Matthew 4:13–16 tells the reader that Jesus left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum. He further points out that this is in the territory of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. This rather detailed geographical note likely represents a broader conviction of the restoration of the complete territory of the twelve tribes in fulfillment of Isa 9:1–2.57

The restoration of the tribes of Israel in the land is again alluded to in Matt 8:11–12, where Jesus predicts:

I tell you, many will come from east and west, and will sit at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven; but the sons of the Kingdom will depart into the darkness outside; there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

To interpret this prediction as a promise of the reconstitution of Israel back into the promised land is not uncontroversial. The majority of Matthean exegetes assume that only the Gentiles are meant by the term many, given the juxtaposition of the centurion’s faith and the lack of faith in Israel.58 This interpretation, however, is not as obvious as one might think, as Davies and Allison have shown.59 They rightly argue that “in Israel” should be understood not in an ethnic sense, but in a geographical sense:

The point of 8:11f. would then lie not in the salvation of the Gentiles as opposed to the damnation of all Jews but in the salvation of the seemingly unfortunate as opposed to “sons of the kingdom,” the wise and privileged who have lived in Eretz Israel and beheld the Messiah, and yet did not believe.60

of God and the kingdom of David. Of Pss. Sol. 17, he observes: ‘The poet who confessed that the Lord was King and that the ‘Kingdom of God was forever in judgment’ (Ps Sol 17:1, 4) also reminded the Lord that the Lord had chosen David to be king over Israel (Ps Sol 17:5) and urged the Lord to raise up for his chosen people their king, the son of David (Ps Sol 14:23) . . . though the Lord himself would be King at the same time’; cf. also William Horbury, Messianism among Jews and Christians: Twelve Biblical and Historical Studies (London: T & T. Clark, 2003), 45.

57 For a more detailed argument for this point, see Willitts, Matthew’s Messianic Shepherd-King.


59 Davies and Allison, Matthew, 2:27–29.

60 Ibid., 28.
Thus, Matthew’s narrative does not exclude Israel here. Instead, the Diaspora, who are spread throughout the known world, are in view. These will be ingathered to the land of Israel in the messianic age; but those who have lived in the land of Israel and have rejected the Messiah will be excluded.

This geographical perspective on the division of God’s people also has a parallel in Pss. Sol. 17. The author of the Psalms of Solomon clearly delineated two groups within the one people of Israel and believed that they themselves were the “sinfully righteous”⁶¹ who were prepared for the arrival of the Davidic king. At his advent they would receive God’s mercy and deliverance from their enemies. The other subgroup within Israel, though they were members of national Israel by birth, would be removed from the land and destroyed with the lawless Gentiles. What is important for our interests is that the demarcation between the righteous subgroup and the unrighteous is geographical: the fundamental interest of the author of the Psalms of Solomon is on the people of Israel who reside within the promised land. And as such, this Israel, according to the Psalms of Solomon, is on the whole unrighteous (17:20). It appears the subgroup to which the author belongs are the only righteous within the land.⁶²

The geographical perspective in Psalms of Solomon is perhaps evidence of a “cultic topography,” which is evinced in the Priestly legislation regarding Jerusalem. D. Wright has noted the “graduated system” which determines the purity of a locality by its proximity to the temple.⁶³ The temple, being the “most holy place,” has the highest degree of purity. Then with each concentric circle from the center, the level of purity decreases. This would go a long way in explaining both the comprehensive application of the term sinners by the Psalms of Solomon and its negative view of the legitimacy and purity of the current temple establishment,⁶⁴ as well as their seemingly wholesale acceptance of the Diaspora (17:17).

This preferential perspective of the Psalms of Solomon for Jews in dispersion is perhaps reflective also of Jeremiah’s remnant theology. In contrast to his prophetic predecessors, Jeremiah seems to believe that the true remnant of Israel is not the remnant who remained in Judah but those who have been scattered throughout the earth.⁶⁵ For example, in Jer 23:3 YHWH states: “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to

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⁶¹. See Winninge, Sinners, 131–34, for an explanation of this category name; also see Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 389; P. N. Franklyn, “The Cultic and Pious Climax of Eschatology in the Psalms of Solomon,” JS 18 (1987): 8.

⁶². See Pomykala (Davdic, 163), who concludes that “this deep division between pious Jews and sinners indicates an ideology in which the author and his community no longer look for reform of the current social and political landscape, but envision a completely new configuration.”


⁶⁴. For the document’s negative view of the temple establishment and the apparent removal, see Pss. Sol. 1:8, 2:3, and 17:6; cf. Hann, “The Community of the Pious,” 176.

which I have banished them.” The remnant is considered by Jeremiah to be those who are dispersed and are called “my flock.” It is these scattered whom YHWH intends to return to their own soil in such a miraculous manner of deliverance that it will be considered a New Exodus. What is more, he will raise up to rule over them “a true branch of David’s line” (23:7–8). When this remnant theology is combined with the “cultic topography,” this positive attitude toward the Diaspora is comprehensible.

Matthew’s geographical perspective is distinct from Psalms of Solomon in that it is one’s relationship not to the temple that is determinative of purity or impurity but to the Messiah: “the one greater than the temple” (Matt 12:6). However, it seems the same geographical orientation applies.

Nevertheless, the “many” in Matt 8:11 probably has both Diaspora Jews and Gentiles in view and, in this way, fits comfortably in the Matthean context. In Jewish eschatological expectation, both Jews and Gentiles will make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the messianic age. Several passages in the Hebrew Bible suggest that, in the wake of the restored kingdom, Gentiles will be the vehicles by which the sons and daughters of Israel are brought back to the promised land (cf. Isa 2:1–4, 49:22, 55:1–5, 66:18–21; Ezek 37:24–28). What is more, the Psalms of Solomon reflects this expectation. Pss. Sol. 17:30–31 states (note emphasized words):

[Messiah] will cleanse Jerusalem and make it holy, as it was even from the beginning, with the result that nations will come from the ends of the earth in order to see his [Messiah’s] glory, when they bear the gifts of her [Jerusalem’s] children who have fainted, and in order to see the glory of the Lord, with which God had glorified her.

Having developed Matt 8:11–12 at length because of its controversial nature, I merely wave my at hand a couple more to show that this is not a singly attested theme in the First Gospel. First, and most important, is Matt 19:28, wherein Jesus states that the twelve tribes of Israel will be reconstituted in the land: “Truly I say to you, in the age to come when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will yourselves sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Second, and more suggestively, is the reference to the regathering of the elect of Israel to the land in 24:31: “And he will send his angels with a great trumpet, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”

The Mercy of Messiah on the “Gentiles”

Although both documents appear to be ambivalent toward the Gentile world, both contain a conviction that Gentiles who show proper deference

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67. I have made the suggestion of the presence of an expectation of territorial restoration in Matthew in Matthew, 157–73.
to the Messiah will be shown mercy. Within Pss. Sol. 17, two distinct approaches to the Gentiles are evident: one negative and one positive. On the one hand, it is clear that the author desires for God to “cleanse Jerusalem” of the Gentiles (17:22), “destroy Gentile lawlessness” (17:24) and “cause the nations to flee” (17:25). But it appears that these statements are aimed not at Gentiles in general, but at the Gentile oppressors who are exercising political domination over Israel. The context suggests that the “Gentiles” in view are the Gentile rulers who have oppressed and defiled Jerusalem and the land (e.g., 17:22; cf. 17:11–20). Thus, the geographical perspective described above seems to be evident here as well. The author’s desire for judgment to fall on the Gentiles is related to their occupation of the promised land in general and Jerusalem in particular.

On the other hand, the Gentiles who show proper deference to the Messiah, according to the psalmist, will be shown mercy. In Pss. Sol. 17:34b–35a the author states:

And he will show mercy to all nations that come before him in fear.
For he will strike the earth with the word of his mouth forever.

This assertion states that the Davidic king will show mercy to the nations who revere him (ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν φόβῳ) based (γὰρ) on the fact that the Messiah will “strike the earth with the word of his mouth.” The word φόβος in 17:34c could be understood in one of two ways. Either the author means to say that the Gentiles, because of God’s judgment, will be intimidated, frightened, and terrified, or he means to say that they will be reverent and respectful. The latter option appears more likely for two reasons.

First, if the first option is what the author meant, it begs the question: why would he show them mercy simply because they are terrified of his judgment? It is safe to assume that the judgment of the messianic king under the authority of YHWH will be frightful to all. The mercy granted implies something more than emotional terror; it implies a proper attitude toward the one who is terrifying. Thus, the verse states that the Davidic king will “show mercy to the nations” because of their posture toward him in light of his judgment. Second, all the uses of either the verb or the

68. See Pss. Sol. 17:28: “the alien and the foreigner will no longer live with them.” The idea here is not that from this point on there will not be “aliens” (especially προσήλυτος) residing among them but that there will not be a people “foreign to their race” who will occupy the land and exercise sovereignty over them. The land in its fullness will be distributed to Israel and will be their possession. The fact that all foreigners or strangers in general are not in view here, but only those who are unauthorized and illegitimate, is confirmed by observations based on the Hebrew Bible foundation of these expectations: Ezek. 47:13–23; Joel 3[4]:17 (cf. Atkinson, Ps. Sol., 351; Brandenburg, “Gesalbte,” 227; de Jonge, “Psalms,” 175; Holm-Nielsen, Psalmen Salomos, 103). The later states: “And Jerusalem will be holy and strangers shall never again pass through it [καὶ ἄλλογενής οὐ διελεύσονται δι’ αὐτῆς οὐκέτι].” In this context, the referent of ἄλλογενής is not “foreigners” generally, but “the warriors” (τῶν μαχητῶν) from alien nations (3[4]:9–11). Those that will not again pass through the land are armies that wish to seize control over it and occupy it. The expectation here in Psalms of Solomon is identical because the overall structural interest in this passage with respect to the Gentiles is the removal of foreign sovereignty (cf. 17:22, 24, 25).
noun of the root φοβ in Psalms of Solomon, save this one, are directed toward righteous, Jewish persons or, as in 17:40, to the Messiah himself. 69 One text, 2:33, is quite relevant to our verse here for it states, “Praise God, you who fear the Lord with understanding, for the Lord’s mercy is upon those who fear him with judgment.” Given these two observations, it is best to take “fear” here to be the proper attitude of a person toward YHWH as vice regent.

Perhaps undergirding this perspective, along with Pss. Sol. 17:30, is Isa 56:3–8 and especially 56:6–7 (LXX):

As for the foreigners [τοῖς ἀλλογενέσι] who join themselves to the Lord, in order to serve him [δουλεύων αὐτῶ], and to love the name of the Lord, in order to be his servants [δούλους], all who keep the Sabbath and do not profane it, and who hold fast to my covenant. I will bring them to my holy mountain and I will make them happy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be welcome on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Interestingly, 56:8 reveals that this discussion of the new relationship the nations have with YHWH in the eschatological age of restoration (cf. Isa 54) is within the context of YHWH gathering of the dispersed of Israel: “Thus declares the Lord God, Who gathers the dispersed of Israel: ‘I will gather still more to those already gathered.’” Likewise, the mercy extended to the nations described here in Pss. Sol. 17:34c–36 is placed within the context of the reconstitution of Israel by the gathering and redistributing activity of the Messiah (Pss. Sol. 17:26–28). Thus, the new relationship with the Davidic king (and so YHWH) is a complementary circumstance to the reconstitution of Israel in the promised land. There has been, however, a development in Psalms of Solomon on this theme because, whereas in Isaiah it is YHWH to whom the Gentiles submit themselves and serve, in Psalms of Solomon the figure is God’s viceroy, the messianic Davidic king; this, however, is no contradiction, as I have already pointed out.

The Gospel of Matthew seems to be equally ambivalent about the Gentiles (cf. 5:47, 6:7, 18:17), although they have an important place in the narrative and are beneficiaries of the blessings of the Kingdom along with the Jews. 70 Even within the genealogy, there is evidence of Matthew’s emphasis on the implications of the gospel for Gentiles (cf. the women in the genealogy, for example, Tamar), 71 while the Gospel concludes with a commission to “make disciples of all nations” (28:19–20). Gentile characters play significant roles in the narrative of Matthew as well. For example, the Magi from the east (2:1–12), the Roman centurion (8:5–13), the Canaanite woman (15:21–28), and the centurion at the foot of the cross (27:54) are pivotal figures in the story. However, with each of these there is a com-

70. See Novakovic (Messiah, 150–51) who makes specific mention of the similarity of Pss. Sol. 17 and Matthew on this point; see also Davies and Allison, Matthew, 1:171.
71. Ibid.
mon denominator that reflects the outlook of the Psalms of Solomon: their deference to the messianic king.

This deference to the Messiah is most clearly visible in the unusual story of the Canaanite woman in Matt 15:21–28. The text tells us that a woman came from the territories of Tyre and Sidon and asked Jesus to heal her daughter of demon possession. She approached Jesus in a position of humility and addressed him with the Davidic title “son of David” as well as acknowledged his lordship three times. Initially, Jesus refuses her request with the statement that he has been sent “only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Not taking no for an answer, the woman accepts Jesus’ statement but asserts that that should not disqualify her from her request being granted. In response to this Jesus grants her request and responds with exclamation of her great faith.

A full discussion of this pericope is not possible here, but several observations will be made with respect to the issue of mercy extended to the Gentiles. First, the woman is a Gentile and comes from a Gentile region. Second, her approach and address were appropriate to the identity of Jesus as God’s Messiah: she prostrated herself, acknowledged him to be Israel’s legitimate king, and recognized his lordship. Third, when her request was initially refused by Jesus’ Israel-centric statement, she acknowledged her ethnic position vis-à-vis Israel. Fourth, Jesus granted her request based on this response. What seems to suggest itself from these observations is that the issue here is political. Jesus related to this person not as a woman but as a Gentile. Jesus, Israel’s Davidic Messiah, showed the non-Jewish woman mercy and granted her request, because she had a proper political Israel-centric outlook. Hence, Jesus dispensed the power of the Kingdom of God to a Gentile who showed proper deference to him as Israel’s messianic king.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion of some of the parallels between Psalms of Solomon and Matthew should at least caution against the much-too-common practice of comparing the two texts in an overly simplistic manner. A careful examination of the two documents shows a good many connections of a nature that point in the direction of a shared messianic conception. The supposed differences between the perspectives in the documents need to be placed within this acknowledged common standpoint. While there very well may be real differences between the texts, those sometimes noted by commentators may be more perceived than real.

72. For a more detailed discussion of this story, see Willitts, Matthew’s Messianic Shepherd-King, 203–19.

Admittedly, some of the connections I noticed above are dependent on interpretations of Matthean passages slightly out of step with conventional readings found in standard commentaries. This is surely the result of placing the First Gospel in close contact with *Psalms of Solomon*. I found reading Matthew by the light of *Psalms of Solomon* a highly illuminating experience. The light emanating from the *Psalms of Solomon* came at Matthew’s story from a slightly different angle, revealing aspects that had been obfuscated by the shadows created by other lights. Nevertheless, even if one finds it difficult to agree with a few of my readings of Matthew, the central contention of this essay loses little of its force.