

# THE BOOKS OF MACCABEES AND RABBINIC THOUGHT: GETTING TO THE ROOTS OF HANUKKAH

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1. I Macc. 2:23-27 (Anchor Bible trans.)

When he had finished uttering these words, a Jewish man came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice upon the altar in Modein in accordance with the king's decree. When Mattathias saw this, he was filled with zeal and trembled with rage and let his anger rise, as was fitting; he ran and slew him upon the altar...He acted zealously for the sake of the Torah, as Phineas acted against Zimri the son of Salom. Mattathias cried out throughout the town in a loud voice, "All who are zealous for the sake of the Torah, who uphold the covenant, march out after me!"

2. I Macc. 2:49-50, 54 (Anchor Bible trans.)

When the time drew near for Mattathias to die, he said to his sons, "...my children, be zealous for the Torah, and be ready to give your lives for the covenant of our fathers...Phineas, our ancestor, through his act of zeal received a pact of priesthood for all time."

3. Jerusalem Talmud Sanhedrin 9:7 (27b)

Pinehas did not act in accordance with the Sages. R. Judah b. Pazi said: the Sages wanted to excommunicate him, were it not for the divine spirit that jumped in and said that he and his descendants shall have an eternal covenant of priesthood.

ירושלמי סנהדרין ט ז (כז עמוד ב)

ופינחס שלא ברצון חכמים אמר רבי יודה בר פזי ביקשו לנדונו אילולי שקפצה עליו רוח הקודש ואמרה והיתה לו ולזרעו אחריו ברית כהונת עולם וגו'.

4. Mishnah Avot 1:12

Hillel used to say: Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving people and bringing them near to the Torah.

משנה אבות א: יב

הלל ושמאי קבלו מהם הלל אומר הוי מתלמידי של אהרן אוהב שלום ורודף שלום אוהב את הבריות ומקרבו לתורה.

5. Zechariah 4:2, 6

<sup>2</sup>He said to me, "What do you see?" And I answered, "I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl above it..."<sup>6</sup>Then he explained to me as follows: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit—said the Lord of Hosts.

זכריה ד ב, ו

(ב) ויאמר אלי מה אפה ראה ויאמר נאמר כאיתי והנה מנורת זהב כלה וגלה על ראשה... (ו) ויען ויאמר אלי לאמר זה דבר ה' אל זרובבל לאמר לא בחיל ולא בכח כי אם ברוחי אמר ה' צבאות:

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## 6. Avodah Zarah 8a

Said R. Hanan b. Raba: KALENDA is kept on the eight days following the [winter] equinox. SATURNALIA on the eight days preceding the equinox... Our Rabbis taught: When Adam the First saw the day getting gradually shorter, he said, Woe is me, perhaps because I have sinned, the world around me is being darkened and returning to its state of chaos and confusion; this then is the kind of death to which I have been sentenced from Heaven! So he began keeping an eight days' fast. But as he observed the winter equinox and noted the day getting increasingly longer, he said, This is the world's course, and he set forth to keep an eight days' festivity. In the following year he appointed both as festivals. Now, he fixed them for the sake of Heaven, but the [heathens] appointed them for the sake of idolatry.

### עבודה זרה ח.

גמ'. אמר רב חנן בר רבא: קלנדא - ח' ימים אחר תקופה, סטרנורא - ח' ימים לפני תקופה... ת"ר: לפי שראה אדם הראשון יום שמתמעט והולך, אמר: אוי לי, שמא בשביל שסרחתי עולם חשוך בעדי וחוזר לתוהו ובוהו, וזו היא מיתה שנקנסה עלי מן השמים, עמד וישב ח' ימים בתענית [ובתפלה], כיון שראה תקופת טבת וראה יום שמאריך והולך, אמר: מנהגו של עולם הוא, הלך ועשה שמונה ימים טובים, לשנה האחרת עשאן לאלו ולאלו ימים טובים, הוא קבעם לשם שמים, והם קבעום לשם עבודת כוכבים.

## 7. Mishnah Bikkurim 1:6

From Shavuot till Sukkot one may bring [Bikkurim] and make the recital; from Sukkot till Hanukkah, one may bring, but does not make the recital. R. Judah b. Bathyra says: one may bring and also make the recital.

### משנה ביכורים א:ו

מעצרת ועד החג מביא וקורא מן החג ועד חנוכה מביא ואינו קורא רבי יהודה בן בתירא אומר מביא וקורא.

## 8. I Macc. 1:54, 59 (Anchor Bible trans.)

On the fifteenth day of Kislev...the king had an abomination of desolation built upon the altar...as on the twenty-fifth day of the month they would offer sacrifices on the illicit altar which was upon the temple altar.

## 9. I Macc. 4:52-54 (Anchor Bible trans.)

They rose early on the morning of the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month (that is, the month of Kislev)...and they brought a sacrifice according to the Torah upon the new altar of burnt offerings which they had built. At the very time of year and on the very day on which the gentiles had profaned the altar...

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10. II Macc.10:5-8 (Anchor Bible trans.)

On the very same date on which the temple was profaned by foreigners occurred the purification of the temple, on the twenty-fifth of the ninth month (that is, Kislev). Joyfully they held an eight-day celebration, after the pattern of Tabernacles, remembering how a short time before they spent the festival of Tabernacles like wild beasts, in the mountains and in the caves. Therefore, holding wreathed wands, and branches bearing ripe fruit, and palm fronds, they offered songs of praise to Him Who had victoriously brought about the purification of His Place. By vote of the commonwealth they decreed a rule for the entire nation of the Jews to observe these days annually.

11. Megillah 14a

Only the prophecy which contained a lesson for future generations was written down, and that which did not contain such a lesson was not written.

מגילה יד:

כדתניא: הרבה נביאים עמדו להם לישראל, כפלים כיוצאי מצרים, אלא, נבואה שהוצרכה לדורות נכתבה, ושלא הוצרכה לא נכתבה.

12. Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1

All Israel have a portion in the World to Come, for it is written, your people are all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified. But the following have no portion therein: he who maintains that resurrection is not a biblical doctrine, the Torah was not divinely revealed, and an Epikoros. R. Akiba added: one who reads uncanonical books.

משנה סנהדרין י:א:

כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא שנאמר (ישעיה ס"ו) ועמד כולם צדיקים לעולם יירשו ארץ נצר מטעי מעשי ידי להתפאר ואלו שאין להם חלק לעולם הבא האומר אין תחיית המתים מן התורה ואין תורה מן השמים ואפיקורס רבי עקיבא אומר אף הקורא בספרים החיצונים...

13. Jerusalem Talmud Sanhedrin 10:1 (28a)

R. Akiba added: one who reads uncanonical books, such as the books of Ben Sira and the books of Ben La'aga. But he who reads the books of Homer and all other books that were written from then on, is considered like one who is reading a secular document.

תלמוד ירושלמי סנהדרין י:א דף כח טור א

רבי עקיבא אומר אף הקורא בספרים החיצונים כגון סיפרי בן סירא וסיפרי בן לענה אבל סיפרי המירס וכל ספרים שנכתבו מכאן והילך הקורא בהן כקורא באיגרת.

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## 14. Sanhedrin 100b

R. Akiba added: one who reads uncanonical books: A Tanna taught: this means the books of the heretics. R. Joseph said, it is also forbidden to read the book of Ben Sira.

סנהדרין ק:

רבי עקיבא אומר: אף הקורא בספרים החיצונים וכו'. תנא: בספרי מינים. רב יוסף אמר: בספר בן סירא נמי אסור למיקרי.

## 15. II Macc. 2:1-8 (Anchor Bible trans.)

In our documents we find that it was Jeremiah the prophet...on receiving a divine revelation, ordered that the tabernacle and the ark should go with him. It went on to say that Jeremiah went out to the mountain which Moses ascended to see the heritage promised by God. There, Jeremiah found a save chamber and brought into it the tabernacle and the ark and the incense altar and blocked up the entrance. Some of those who had come along went back to mark the path, but they could not find it. When Jeremiah found out, he rebuked them, saying, "The place will remain unknown until God gathers His people together in the Age of Mercy. At that time the Lord will bring these things to light again, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will be seen, as they were over Moses and as Solomon, too, requested, in order that the Place should be greatly sanctified."

For further reading:

Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, "The Day of the Foundation Laying of God's Temple" (Hebrew), *Megadim* 12 (1990), pp. 49-97.

Jonathan A. Goldstein, *Anchor Bible: I and II Maccabees* (New York: Doubleday, 1976, 1983).

Rabbi Gershon Kitsis, "Sukkoth and Chanukkah: Common Threads from Common Themes," *Jewish Thought* 1:1 (1990), pp. 87-99.

Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991 ed.), pp. 86-102.