

Christians and the Books of the Maccabees

Marty Lockshin

Torah in Motion, 2024

An open book with aged, yellowed pages is shown against a dark background. A white, torn-edged paper overlay is placed over the center of the book, containing the text. The book is open, with pages visible on both sides of the spine.

Why are the Books of the
Maccabees NOT IN A
Jewish Bible?

Mishnah
Yadayim
3:5

כָּל כְּתָבֵי הַקְּדוּשָׁה
מְטַמְּאִין אֶת
הַיָּדַיִם.

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Tosefta Yadaim 2

סְפָרֵי בֶן סִירָא,
וְכָל סְפָרִים
שֶׁנִּכְתְּבוּ מִפָּאן
וְאֵילָךְ, אֵינָן
מְטַמְּאִין אֶת
הַיָּדִים.

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VETERIS TESTAMENTI

PENTATEUCHUS id est GENESIS · EXODUS · LEVITICUS · NUMERI · DEU- YERONOMIUM	BIA · ECCLESIASTES · CANTICUM CANTICORUM
IOSUE · IUDICUM · RUTH	SAPIENTIA
SAMUEL · MALACHIM seu REGUM	SIRACH seu ECCLESIASTICUS
VERBA DIERUM seu PARALIPOME- NON	ISAIAS
EZRAS	HIEREMIAS · THRENI seu LAMENTA- TIONES · BARUCH
TOBIAS	HIEZECHIEL
IUDITH	DANIEL
HESTER	XII PROPHETAE qui sunt OSEE · IOHEL · AMOS · ABDIAS · IONAS · MI- CHA · NAUM · ABACUC · SOFONIAS · AGGEUS · ZACCHARIAS · MALACHI
JOB	MACCHABEORUM
PSALMI	
LIBRI SALOMONIS id est PROVER-	

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Winston Churchill, May 19, 1940

Today is Trinity Sunday. Centuries ago, words were written to be a call and a spur to the faithful servants of Truth and Justice: ‘Arm yourselves, and **be ye men of valour**, and be in readiness for the conflict; for it is better for us to perish in battle than to look upon the outrage of our nation and our altar. As the Will of God is in Heaven, even so let it be.’

Winston Churchill, May 19, 1940

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Inscription on tomb of the Crusader king, Baldwin I of Jerusalem (1100-1118)

King Baldwin, a second Judas Maccabeus, the hope of his country, the strength of the Church, the pride of both, feared by all, to whom gifts were brought by the tribes of Kedar and Egypt, Dan and man-slaying Damascus, is enclosed, alas, in this narrow tomb.

Different Christian Groups

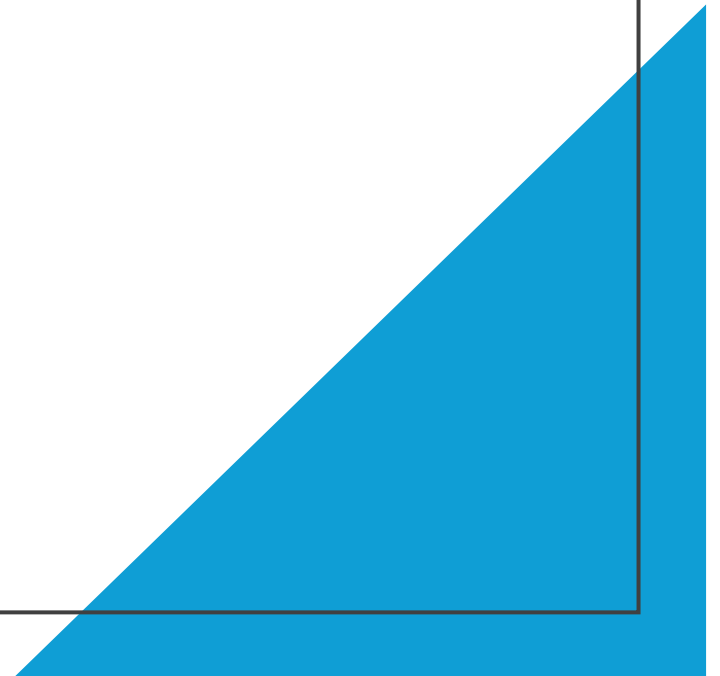
Catholics: yes.

Eastern Orthodox: Yes.

Protestants: Some yes,
most no.

A Different attitude to

מִכְּפֹאֵן וְאֵילָךְ



Reasons why we
would **not** expect
Maccabees in a
Christian Bible

Circumcision

I Maccabees 1: 11-15: In those days there appeared in Israel transgressors of the law who seduced many, saying: “Let us go and make a covenant with the Gentiles all around us; since we separated from them, many evils have come upon us.” . . . Thereupon they built a gymnasium* in Jerusalem according to the Gentile custom. They disguised their circumcision and abandoned the holy covenant; they allied themselves with the Gentiles and sold themselves to wrongdoing.

I Maccabees 1:60: Mothers who had allowed their babies to be circumcised were put to death in accordance with the king's decree. Their babies were hung around their necks, and their families and those who had circumcised them were put to death.

I Maccabees 1 (cont.)

But many in Israel were determined and resolved in their hearts not to eat anything unclean;

they preferred to die rather than to be defiled with food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die.

1 Maccabees 2

All those who were fleeing from the persecutions joined them [Matityahu and his faction] and supported them. They gathered an army and struck down sinners in their wrath and the lawless in their anger, and the survivors fled to the Gentiles for safety. Matityahu and his friends went about and tore down the pagan altars; they also **forcibly circumcised** (!) any uncircumcised boys whom they found in the territory of Israel.

**CONTRAST: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE
GALATIANS
(C. 50 CE)**

**GALATIA WAS A ROMAN PROVINCE IN MODERN-DAY
TURKEY, EXTENDING FROM THE BLACK SEA TO THE
MEDITERRANEAN**

Galatians chapter 1

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

Galatians chapters 3, 5

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” . . .

Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. . . . You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? . . . As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

Matityahu on his death-bed

1 Maccabees chapter 2

Now the days drew near for Matityahu to die, and he said to his sons: “Arrogance and scorn have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger. ⁵⁰ Now, my children, **show zeal for the law** and give your lives for the covenant of our ancestors.

⁵¹ “Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations, and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name. . . . ⁵⁸ Elijah, because of **great zeal for the law**, was taken up into heaven. ⁵⁹ Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. . . . ⁶⁴ My children, be courageous and **grow strong in the law**, for by it you will gain honor.

So why do Christians Venerate the Maccabees?

One contemporary Christian writer:

I would like to make one important point about these martyrs ... the fact that *they lived before Our Lord*. Further, they were killed because they showed their devotion to the Law of Moses by refusing to eat pork – and the vast majority of Christians considered that there was no prohibition upon their (that is, the Christians’) eating pork So how could Christians venerate people who were not Christians and had died for a principle which we do not even hold?

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Nevertheless

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The Centrality of Martyrdom



Martyrdom in First Maccabees (6)

Now a part of the king's army was spread out on the high hills, and some troops were on the plain, and they advanced steadily and in good order. . . . Judas and his army advanced to the battle, and six hundred of the king's army fell. Now Eleazar, called Avaran, saw that one of the animals was equipped with royal armor. It was taller than all the others, and he supposed that the king was on it. **So he gave his life to save his people and to win for himself an everlasting name.**

Martyrdom in Second Maccabees (6)

Eleazar, one of the scribes in high position, a man now advanced in age and of noble presence, was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine's flesh. But he, welcoming death with honor rather than life with pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh, as all ought to do who have the courage to refuse things that it is not right to taste, even for the natural love of life.

. . . [As he died a horrible death,] he groaned aloud and said, "It is clear to the Lord in his holy knowledge that, though I might have been saved from death, I am enduring terrible sufferings in my body under this beating, but in my soul, I am glad to suffer these things because I fear him."

- + . Fourth Maccabees
- o (sometimes called “on the Supremacy of Reason”)

1st century C.E.

Fourth Maccabees 18

The speech of the mother to her sons:

A happy man was he [your father], who lived out his life with good children, and did not have the grief of bereavement. While he [your father] was still with you, he taught you the law and the prophets. He read to you about Abel slain by Cain, and Isaac who was offered as a burnt offering, and about Joseph in prison. He told you of the zeal of Phinehas, and he taught you about Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael in the fire. He praised Daniel in the den of the lions and blessed him. He reminded you of the scripture of Isaiah (43:2), which says, “Even though you go through the fire, the flame shall not consume you.”

Eastern Orthodox: The Seven Holy Maccabean Martyrs: Habim, Antonin, Guriah, Eleazar, Eusebon, Hadim (Halim) and Marcellus, their mother Solomonia and their teacher Eleazar [Commemorated on August 1]

The Seven Holy Maccabean Martyrs: Habim, Antonin, Guriah, Eleazar, Eusebon, Hadim (Halim) and Marcellus, their mother Solomonia and their teacher Eleazar suffered in the year 166 before the Birth of Christ under the impious Syrian emperor Antiochos Epiphanos. Adhering to an Hellenistic cult, Antiochos Epiphanos introduced pagan customs at Jerusalem and throughout all Judea. He desecrated the Temple of the Lord, putting there in a statue of the pagan god Zeus, and forcing the Jews to worship it. Many of them then fell away from the True God. But there were also those, who were deeply sorrowed by the downfall of the people of God and who continued to believe in the coming arrival of the Saviour. A ninety-year-old elder – the law-teacher Eleazar, was brought to trial for his adherence to the Mosaic Law, and he steadfastly underwent tortures and died at Jerusalem. Bravery was likewise shown by the disciples of Saint Eleazar – the Seven Maccabean Brothers and their mother Solomonia. They were brought to trial in Antioch by the emperor Antiochos Epiphanos.

Eastern Orthodox (cont.)

They fearlessly acknowledged themselves as followers of the True God, and refused to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. The eldest of the lads, having been first to answer the emperor in the name of all seven brothers, was given over to fierce tortures in sight of his remaining brothers and their mother. The next five brothers one after the other underwent these tortures. There remained the seventh brother, the very youngest. Antiochos suggested to Saint Solomonia to urge the lad into renunciation, so that at least this final son would remain for her. But the brave mother encouraged him also in the confession of the True God. The lad resolutely ignored the entreaty of the emperor and likewise firmly underwent the tortures, just like his older brothers. After the death of all her seven children, Saint Solomonia, standing over their bodies, raised up her hands in prayer to God and died.

Eastern Orthodox (cont.)

The martyr act of the holy Seven Maccabean Brothers inspired Judas Maccabee, and he led the revolt against Antiochos Epiphanos with the help of God gaining the victory, and then purifying the Jerusalem Temple of idols. All these events are related in the Book of Second Maccabees, which is included within the Bible. Sermons of laudation to the holy Maccabean Martyrs were offered by various fathers of the Church – Sainted Cyprian of Carthage, Sainted Ambrose of Mediolanum (Milan), Sainted Gregory Nazianzus and Sainted John Chrysostomos.

Muslims and the Maccabees?

“Those Jews who militantly resisted the pressure to conform to the majority culture were Muslims (Arabic for faithful followers of God’s will) and their dedication eventually led to religious freedom and national independence for the oppressed Jews living in the Land of Israel.”

(<https://www.eurasiareview.com/10122024-hanukah-and-the-origins-of-religious-martyrdom-oped-2/>)