

WHY AREN'T THE BOOKS OF THE MACCABEES IN THE BIBLE??

Dr Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz
London School of Jewish Studies

Disputes over Books of the Bible

Mishnah, *Eduyot* 5: 3

קהלת אינו מטמא את הידים. כדברי בית שמאי. ובית הלל אומרים מטמא את הידים.

... Kohelet does not make the hands impure, according to the House of Shammai, but the House of Hillel say it does.

Mishnah, *Yadayim*, 3: 5

כל כתבי הקודש מטמאין את הידים. שיר השירים וקהלת מטמאין את הידים. ר' יהודה אומר שיר השירים מטמא את הידים. וקהלת מחלקת. רבי יוסי אומר קהלת אינו מטמא את הידים ושיר השירים מחלקת. רש"א. קהלת מקולי בית שמאי ומחומרי בית הלל. אמר ר"ש בן עזאי. מקובל אני מפי שבעים ושנים זקן ביום שהושיבו את ר' אלעזר בן עזריה בשיבה. ששיר השירים וקהלת מטמאים את הידים. אמר רבי עקיבא. חס ושלום. לא נחלק אדם מישראל על שיר השירים שלא תטמא את הידים. שאין כל העולם כולו כדאי כיום שנתן בו שיר השירים לישראל. שכל הכתובים קודש. ושיר השירים קודש קדשים. ואם נחלקו. לא נחלקו אלא על קהלת.

Shir Hashirim and Kohelet make the hands impure.

Rabbi Yehudah says: Shir Hashirim makes the hands impure, but the status of Kohelet is disputed.

Rabbi Yose says: Kohelet does not make the hands impure, but the status of Shir Hashirim is disputed ...

Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai says: I heard from the 72 sages [the Sanhedrin] who elected Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah [as *nasi*] that both Shir Hashirim and Kohelet make the hands impure.

Rabbi Akiva says: Heaven forbid! Nobody ever disputed the status of Shir Hashirim, for the entire world is not worth the day on which Shir Hashirim was given to Israel; for all the Scriptures are holy, but Shir Hashirim is the Holy of Holies! And if they did disagree, it was only about Kohelet.

Avot derabi natan, 1: 2

Abba Shaul says: ... Originally, it is said, Mishlei [Proverbs], Shir Hashirim and Kohelet were suppressed; for since they were held to be mere parables and no part of the Holy Writings, they arose and suppressed them; until the men of Hezekiah came and interpreted them.

The Biblical Book that Isn't a Biblical Book

Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus), 44: 1-15

Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us.
The Lord hath wrought great glory by them through his great power from the beginning.
Such as did bear rule in their kingdoms, men renowned for their power, giving counsel
by their understanding, and declaring prophecies:
Leaders of the people by their counsels, and by their knowledge of learning meet for the
people, wise and eloquent are their instructions:
Such as found out musical tunes, and recited verses in writing:
Rich men furnished with ability, living peaceably in their habitations:
All these were honoured in their generations, and were the glory of their times.
There be of them, that have left a name behind them, that their praises might be reported.
And some there be, which have no memorial; who are perished, as though they had never
been; and are become as though they had never been born; and their children after them.
But these were merciful men, whose righteousness hath not been forgotten.
With their seed shall continually remain a good inheritance, and their children are within
the covenant.
Their seed standeth fast, and their children for their sakes.
Their seed shall remain for ever, and their glory shall not be blotted out.
Their bodies are buried in peace; but their name liveth for evermore.
The people will tell of their wisdom, and the congregation will shew forth their praise.

Tosefta, *Yadayim* 2: 13

ספרי בן סירה וכל ספרים שנכתבו מכאן ואילך אינן מטמאין את הידים

... The books of Ben Sira and all the books written from then onwards do not make the hands impure.

The Candidates

1 Maccabees, 2: 1-28

In those days Mattathias the son of John, son of Simeon, a priest of the sons of Joarib, moved from Jerusalem and settled in Mode'in. He had five sons, John surnamed Gaddi, Simon called Thassi, Judas called Maccabeus, Eleazar called Avaran, and Jonathan called Apphus.

He saw the blasphemies being committed in Judah and Jerusalem, and said, ‘Alas! Why was I born to see this, the ruin of my people, the ruin of the holy city, and to dwell there when it was given over to the enemy, the sanctuary given over to aliens? Her temple has become like a man without honour; her glorious vessels have been carried into captivity. Her babes have been killed in her streets, her youths by the sword of the foe. What nation has not inherited her palaces and has not seized her spoils? All her adornment has been taken away; no longer free, she has become a slave. And behold, our holy place, our beauty, and our glory have been laid waste; the Gentiles have profaned it. Why should we live any longer?’ And Mattathias and his sons rent their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourned greatly.

Then the king's officers who were enforcing the apostasy came to the city of Mode'in to make them offer sacrifice. Many from Israel came to them; and Mattathias and his sons were assembled. Then the king's officers spoke to Mattathias as follows: ‘You are a leader, honoured and great in this city, and supported by sons and brothers. Now be the first to come and do what the king commands, as all the gentiles and the men of Judah and those that are left in Jerusalem have done. Then you and your sons will be numbered among the friends of the king, and you and your sons will be honored with silver and gold and many gifts.’

But Mattathias answered and said in a loud voice: ‘Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him, and have chosen to do his commandments, departing each one from the religion of his fathers, yet I and my sons and my brothers will live by the covenant of our fathers. Far be it from us to desert the law and the ordinances. We will not obey the king's words by turning aside from our religion to the right hand or to the left.’

When he had finished speaking these words, a Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice upon the altar in Mode'in, according to the king's command. When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him upon the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he burned with zeal for the law, as Phinehas did against Zimri the son of Salu.

Then Mattathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: ‘Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!’ And he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the city. Then many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to dwell there, they, their sons, their wives, and their cattle, because evils pressed heavily upon them.

2 Maccabees, Chapter 7: 1-6, 24-39

It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and cords, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, ‘What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our fathers.’

The king fell into a rage, and gave orders that pans and cauldrons be heated. These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out ...

the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, ‘The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song which bore witness against the people to their faces, when he said, “And he will have compassion on his servants.”’ ...

... The youngest brother being still alive, Antiochus not only appealed to him in words, but promised with oaths that he would make him rich and enviable if he would turn from the ways of his fathers... Since the young man would not listen to him at all, the king called the mother to him and urged her to advise the youth to save himself. After much urging on his part, she undertook to persuade her son. But, leaning close to him, she spoke in their native tongue as follows, deriding the cruel tyrant: ‘My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you. I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus also mankind comes into being. Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God’s mercy I may get you back again with your brothers.’

While she was still speaking, the young man said, ‘What are you waiting for? I will not obey the king’s command, but I obey the command of the law that was given to our fathers through Moses. But you, who have contrived all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, will certainly not escape the hands of God. For we are suffering because of our own sins. And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, He will again be reconciled with His own servants. But you, unholy wretch, you most defiled of all men, do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes, when you raise your hand against the children of heaven. You have not yet escaped the judgement of the almighty, all-seeing God. For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of everflowing life under God’s covenant; but you, by the judgement of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance. I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our fathers, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by afflictions and plagues to make you confess that He alone is God, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty which has justly fallen on our whole nation.’

The king fell into a rage, and handled him worse than the others, being exasperated at his scorn. So he died in his integrity, putting his whole trust in the Lord. Last of all, the mother died, after her sons. Let this be enough, then, about the eating of sacrifices and the extreme tortures.

4 Maccabees, 1: 7-12

I could prove to you from many and various examples that reason is dominant over the emotions, but I can demonstrate it best from the noble bravery of those who died for the sake of virtue, Eleazar and the seven brothers and their mother. All of these, by despising sufferings that bring death, demonstrated that reason controls the emotions.

On this anniversary it is fitting for me to praise for their virtues those who, with their mother, died for the sake of nobility and goodness, but I would also call them blessed for the honour in which they are held. For all people, even their torturers, marvelled at their

courage and endurance, and they became the cause of the downfall of tyranny over their nation. By their endurance they conquered the tyrant, and thus their native land was purified through them. I shall shortly have an opportunity to speak of this; but, as my custom is, I shall begin by stating my main principle, and then I shall turn to their story, giving glory to the all-wise God.