

4 Maccabees

Eleazar...the mother...seven sons

from 2 Maccabees

6:18 – 7:42

4 Maccabees

- Purpose: To present an interpretation of Judaism in terms of Greek philosophy.
 - Devout reason is sovereign over the emotions. (1:1)
- Written, 20-54 CE ... Once attributed to Josephus under the title, “On the Supremacy of Reason.”
- In the face of Jewish resistance, Antiochus sought to force all Jews “to eat defiling foods and to renounce Judaism.” (4:26)
- Eleazar, seven sons and their mother.
 - All offered life for eating pork and meat of sacrifices made to idols.
 - All willing to die ... for the Law.

Philosophy of ... 4 Maccabees

- The subject that I am about to discuss is most philosophical, that is, whether devout reason is sovereign over the emotions. (1:1)
- “... 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.” (1:8)
- “... their native land was purified through them.” (1:11)
- “... sound logic prefers the life of **wisdom**. **Wisdom** ... is the knowledge of divine and human matters and the causes of these.” (1:15-16)

rational judgment ... justice ... courage ... self-control

Eleazar - 4 Maccabees

Eleazar ... “leader of the flock” ... “of a priestly family.”

- “Before I begin to torture you, old man, I would advise you to save yourself by eating pork, for I respect your age and your gray hairs. ... **it does not seem to me that you are a philosopher when you observe the religion of the Jews.**

Why, when nature has granted it to us, should you abhor eating the very excellent meat of this animal?

It is senseless not to enjoy delicious things that are not shameful, and wrong to spurn the gifts of nature.

It seems to me that you will do something even more senseless if, by holding a vain opinion concerning the truth, you continue to despise me to your own hurt.

Will you not **awaken from your foolish philosophy**, dispel your futile reasonings, adopt a mind appropriate to your years, **philosophize according to the truth** of what is beneficial ...”

(5:7-11)

Eleazar - 4 Maccabees

- Eleazar's response:
 - "... there is no compulsion more powerful than our **obedience to the law.**" (5:16)
 - "... to transgress the law in matters either small or great is of equal seriousness, for in either case the law is equally despised." (5:20-21)
 - "... it teaches us **self-control ...**"
 - "... it also trains us in **courage ...**"
 - "... it teaches us **piety ...**"
 - "... so that with proper reverence **we worship the only real God.**" (5:23-24)

Eleazar - 4 Maccabees

- Eleazar's response:
 - "... nor will I transgress the sacred **oaths of my ancestors** ... not even if you gouge out my eyes and burn my entrails." (5:29-30)
 - "... **get your torture wheels ready** and fan the fire more vehemently!" (5:32)
- Torture begins ...
 - "... like a noble athlete the old man, while being beaten, was **victorious over his torturers** ..." (6:10)
 - "'We will set before you some cooked meat; save yourself by **pretending to eat pork.**'
But Eleazar, as though more bitterly tormented by this counsel, cried out:
'May we, the children of Abraham, never think so basely that **out of cowardice we feign a role unbecoming to us!**'"
(6:15 & 17)

Eleazar - 4 Maccabees

- “Therefore, O children of Abraham, **die nobly for your religion!**” (6:22)
- “When he was now burned to his very bones and about to expire, he lifted up his eyes to God and said, ‘You know, O God, that though I might have saved myself, I **am dying in burning torments for the sake of the law. Be merciful to your people, and let our punishment suffice for them. Make my blood their purification, and take my life in exchange for theirs.**’
And after he said this, the holy man died nobly in his tortures, and by reason he resisted even to the very tortures of **death for the sake of the law.**” (6:26-30)

Eleazar - 4 Maccabees

- “O aged man, more powerful than tortures; O elder, fiercer than fire; O supreme king over the passions, Eleazar!” (7:10)
- “... though he was an old man, his body no longer tense and firm, his muscles flabby, his sinews feeble, **he became young again ...**” (7:13)
- “O man of blessed age and of venerable gray hair and of law-abiding life, whom the faithful **seal of death has perfected!**” (7:15)
- “... like our patriarchs Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, **do not die to God, but live in God.**” (7:19)
- “What person who lives as a philosopher by the whole rule of philosophy, and trusts in God, and knows that it is blessed to endure any suffering for the sake of virtue, would not be able to **overcome the emotions through godliness? For only the wise and courageous man is lord of his emotions.**” (7:21-23)

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Seven brothers ... handsome ... modest ... noble ... with their aged mother.

- “... you will renounce the ancestral tradition of your national life. And enjoy your youth by adopting the Greek way of life and by changing your manner of living.” (8:7-8)
- “... we are ready to die rather than transgress our ancestral commandments ...” (9:1)
- “For we, through this severe suffering and endurance, shall have the prize of virtue and shall be with God, for whom we suffer; but you ... will deservedly undergo from the divine justice eternal torment by fire.” (9:8-9)
- “Most abominable tyrant, enemy of heavenly justice ... you are mangling me in this manner ... because I protect the divine law.” (9:15)
- “Through all these tortures I will convince you that sons of the Hebrews alone are invincible where virtue is concerned.” (9:18)

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Second brother:

- “You will not escape, most abominable tyrant, the **judgments of the divine wrath.**” (9:32)

Third brother:

- “You do not have a fire hot enough to make me play the coward.” (10:14)

Sixth brother:

- “We six boys have paralyzed your tyranny! (11:24)

Seventh ... youngest son:

- “... justice has laid up for you intense and **eternal fire and tortures**, and these **throughout all time** will never let you go.” (12:12)
- “... on you **he will take vengeance** both in this present life and **when you are dead.**” (12:18)
- “... **he flung himself into the braziers** and so ended his life.” (12:19)

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- “Let us not fear him who thinks he is killing us, for **great is the struggle of the soul** and the danger of eternal torment lying before those who transgress the commandment of God.
Therefore let us put on the full **armor of self-control**, which is divine reason.
For if we so die, **Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will welcome us**, and all the fathers will praise us.” (13:14-17)

The Seven Brothers:

- “... running the course toward **immortality** ...” (14:6)

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The Mother ... (Hannah from the Talmud)

- “... the mother urged them on, each child singly and all together, to death ...” (15:12)
- “How great and how many torments the mother then suffered as her sons were tortured on the wheel and with the hot irons! But **devout reason**, giving her heart a man's **courage in the very midst of her emotions**, strengthened her to disregard her temporal love for her children.
Although she witnessed the destruction of seven children and the ingenious and various rackings, this noble mother disregarded all these because of faith in God.” (15:22-24)
- “... the daughter of God-fearing Abraham ...” (15:28)

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The Mother

- “Alas for my children, some unmarried, others married and without offspring. I shall not see your children or have the happiness of being called grandmother.
Alas, I who had so many and beautiful children am a widow and alone, with many sorrows. Nor when I die, shall I have any of my sons to bury me.” (16:9-11)
- “My sons, noble is the contest to which you are called to **bear witness for the nation. Fight zealously for our ancestral law.**” (16:16)
- “... Abraham was zealous to sacrifice his son Isaac ...” (16:20)
- “... those who die for the sake of God live in God, as do Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the patriarchs.” (16:25)
- “Some of the guards said that when she also was about to be seized and put to death **she threw herself into the flames so that no one might touch her body.**” (17:1)

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Immortality ... and acceptance of sacrifice

- You ... and your sons “... stand in honor before God and are firmly set in heaven with them.” (17:5)
 - “They vindicated their nation ...” (17:10)
 - “The prize was immortality in endless life.” (17:12)
 - “Reverence for God was the victor ...” (17:15)
 - “... they now stand before the divine throne and live through blessed eternity.” (17:18)
 - “... they having become, as it were, a ransom for the sins of the nation.” (17:21)
 - “... through the blood of those devout ones and their death as an expiation, divine Providence preserved Israel that previously had been afflicted.” (17:22)
 - “... those who gave over their bodies in suffering ... were not only admired by men, but also were deemed worthy to share in a divine inheritance.” (18:3)

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In the end ... divine justice ...

- “The tyrant Antiochus was both **punished on earth and is being chastised after his death.**” (18:5)
- “But the sons of Abraham with their victorious mother are gathered together into the chorus of the fathers, and have **received pure and immortal souls from God,** to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (18:23-24)

4 Maccabees - Developments

- No longer is the promise of salvation seen as a clash between good and evil directed solely by God through agents.
 - Only God can defeat evil through dramatic intervention in history.
- Now, the individual, by being faithful can not only save himself but perhaps others ... perhaps the entire nation.
 - Jewish martyrs
 - Personal loyalty to God
 - Standing with God, in victory

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- The martyrs for the Law and the Covenant:
 - “They knew also that **those who die for the sake of God live in God**, as do Abraham and Issac and Jacob and all the patriarchs. (16:25)
 - They “**stand in honor before God** and are firmly set in heaven with them.” (17:5)
 - “**They now stand before the divine throne** and live through blessed eternity.” (17:18)
 - “But the sons of Abraham with their victorious mother are **gathered together into the chorus of the fathers**, and have received pure and immortal souls from God, to whom be glory for ever and ever.” (18:23-24)

2 Maccabees vs. 4 Maccabees

Differences:

- In 2 Macc, Eleazar is forced to “eat swine’s flesh,” but spits it out. (2 Macc 6:18-19)
- In 4 Macc, there is a discourse concerning the eating ... and violation of the Law.
- In 2 Macc, only a portion of one verse is dedicated to the mother ... “Last of all, the mother died, after her sons.” (7:41)
- In 4 Macc, the mother encourages her sons, gives them tribute, understands their sacrifice, and is a noble “daughter of Abraham.” After Eleazar, she stands as the hero of the story.

Theological Implications

- Torah speaks of rewards and punishments for the righteous.
 - Health, long life, many children, fertile crops.
- In the days of Antiochus, however, the righteous suffered for the sake of the Covenant.
- Presents Jewish theological development.
 - Celebrates deeds of martyrs.
 - Saints in heaven intercede for men on earth.
 - The living might pray and offer sacrifices for the dead.
 - The righteous will live in a perfected world ... the souls of the righteous will be in the presence of the Patriarchs and God.
 - The wicked will be punished ... will endure *Gehinnom*.