

Faith & Fanaticism – The Maccabees & Christian Martyrdom

בין האמונה לקנאות – המכבים והמתים הנוצרים

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Christian Sources

1) Tertullian *De Fuga in Persecutione* 9 (c. 212 CE)

So also elsewhere: seek not to die on bridal beds, nor in miscarriages, nor in soft fevers, but to die the martyr's death, that He may be glorified who has suffered for you.

2) Mark 10:32–34 (ca. 70 CE)

32 Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. **33** “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, **34** who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. *Three days later he will rise.*”

3) Mark 10:45 (ca. 70 CE)

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

4) Martyrdom of Anahid [in Brock, *Holy Women*, 95] (ca. mid-5th century CE)

[Adurfrazgard the Magian] ordered two thin threads of cobblers' string to be brought in. This was done. He then told them to tie them into a hangman's noose round her breasts, one thread on each. Two men were to hold on to and pull at each thread until her breasts were severed and fell to the ground... Her two breasts were quickly cut through and hung each by a mere sinew.

Second Temple Sources

5) 1 Maccabees 2:29–41 (Land of Israel, ca. Late 2nd – early 1st century BCE)

[31] And it was reported to the king's officers, and to the troops in Jerusalem the city of David, that men who had rejected the king's command had gone down to the hiding places in the wilderness. **[32]** Many pursued them, and overtook them; they encamped opposite them and prepared for battle against them on the sabbath day. **[33]** And they said to them, "Enough of this! Come out and do what the king commands, and you will live." **[34]** But they said, "We will not come out, nor will we do what the king commands and so profane the sabbath day." **[35]** Then the enemy hastened to attack them. **[36]** But they did not answer them or hurl a stone at them or block up their hiding places, **[37]** for they said, "Let us all die in our innocence; heaven and earth testify for us that you are killing us unjustly." **[38]** So they attacked them on the sabbath, and they died, with their wives and children and cattle, to the number of a thousand persons.

[39] When Mattathias and his friends learned of it, they mourned for them deeply.

[40] And each said to his neighbor: "If we all do as our brethren have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, they will quickly destroy us from the earth." **[41]** So they made this decision that day: "Let us fight against every man who comes to attack us on the sabbath day; let us not all die as our brethren died in their hiding places."

6) 1 Maccabees 3:8 (Land of Israel, ca. Late 2nd – early 1st century BCE)

[8] He went through the cities of Judah;
he destroyed the ungodly out of the land;
thus he turned away wrath from Israel.

7) 2 Maccabees 6:26–28 (Diaspora, ca. 2nd century BCE)

26. "After all, even if now I [i.e. Eleazar the Scribe] do escape punishment by humans, neither living nor dead will I escape the hands of the All-Ruler. 27. Therefore, passing out of life manfully I will on the one hand show myself worthy of old age, 28. And on the other I will leave to the youth a noble example of enthusiastically and nobly dying the good death for the august and holy laws."

8) 2 Maccabees 7:1–6 – The First Son (Diaspora, ca. 2nd century BCE)

[1] 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. [2] 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." [3] The king fell into a rage, and gave orders that pans and caldrons be heated. [4] These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on. [5] When he was utterly helpless, the king ordered them to take him to the fire, still breathing, and to fry him in a pan. The smoke from the pan spread widely, but the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, [6] "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.'"

9) 2 Maccabees 7:37–38 – The Seventh Son (Diaspora, ca. 2nd century BCE)

37. As for me, just as my brothers, I give up both body and soul for the ancestral laws, calling upon God that He speedily become merciful to the people; and that you, after afflictions and scourging, will therefore admit that He alone is God; 38. And that, with me and my brothers, shall be stayed the anger of the All-Ruler which was justly loosed against our entire nation [on account of our sins].

10) 2 Maccabees 7:27–29

[27] 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. [28] 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. [29] 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."

11) 2 Maccabees 8:2–4

2. And they called upon the Lord: To look down upon the people oppressed by all, / and to have pity upon the Sanctuary, which had been profaned by impious men, / 3. And to be merciful also to the city which was being destroyed and about to be leveled to the ground, / and to listen to the blood which was calling out to Him, / 4. and also to remember the lawless destruction of innocent infants and the blasphemies which had been committed against His name - / and (so) to act out of hatred for evil. 5. As soon as Maccabaeus got his corps together he could not be withstood by the Gentiles, the Lord's anger having turned into mercy...

Rabbinic Sources

12) Talmud Bavli, 'Avodah Zarah 17b (ca. 6th century CE)

ת"ר: כשנתפסו רבי אלעזר בן פרטא ורבי חנינא בן תרדין, Our Rabbis taught: When R. Eleazar b. Perata and R.

א"ל ר' אלעזר בן פרטא לרבי חנינא בן תרדיון: אשריך שנתפסת על דבר אחד, אוי לי שנתפסתי על חמשה דברים. א"ל רבי חנינא: אשריך שנתפסת על חמשה דברים ואתה ניצול, אוי לי שנתפסתי על דבר אחד ואיני ניצול, שאת עסקת [בתורה ובגמילות חסדים, ואני לא עסקתי אלא בתורה] בלבד

וכדרב הונא, דאמר רב הונא: כל העוסק בתורה בלבד - דומה כמי שאין לו אלוה, שנאמר: גוימים רבים לישראל ללא אל- [הי אמת] וגו'

אתיהו לרבי אלעזר בן פרטא, אמרו: מ"ט תנית, ומ"ט גנבת? אמר להו: אי סייפא לא ספרא, ואי ספרא לא סייפא, ומדהא ליתא הא נמי ליתא.

Hanina b. Teradion were arrested, R. Eleazar b. Perata said to R. Hanina b. Teradion: Happy art thou that thou hast been arrested on one charge; woe is me, for I am arrested on five charges. R. Hanina replied: Happy art thou, who hast been arrested on five charges, but wilt be rescued; woe is me who, though having been arrested on one charge, will not be rescued; for thou hast occupied thyself with [the study of] the Torah as well as with acts of benevolence, whereas I occupied myself with Torah alone.

This accords with the opinion of R. Huna. For R. Huna said: He who only occupies himself with the study of the Torah is as if he had no God, for it is said: Now for long seasons Israel was without the true God.

When they brought up R. Eleazar b. Perata [for his trial] they asked him, 'Why have you been studying [the Torah] and why have you been stealing?' He answered, 'If the sword, then not the book; and if the book, then not the sword; and as I am not the one I am neither the other...'