

Earliest Christianity within the Boundaries of Judaism

Essays in Honor of Bruce Chilton

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What Shall We Remember, the Deeds or the Faith of Our Ancestors? A Comparison of 1 Maccabees 2 and Hebrews 11

Christian M.M. Brady

In honor of the life and teaching, the learning and leadership of Bruce D. Chilton.

The author of 1 Maccabees is unknown, as is the precise date of composition. While our only sources of the tradition known as Hanukkah come to us through 1 and 2 Maccabees, neither book was preserved in the Jewish canon. The purpose of 1 Maccabees is primarily theo-political: “The author wants to show how God used Judas and his brothers to remove the yoke of Seleucid oppression, and to explain how the Jewish high priesthood came to reside in this family.”¹ It is perhaps this emphasis on the divine guidance of a Jewish uprising against foreign oppressors that led to the suppression of 1 and 2 Maccabees in the wake of failed attempts to overthrow the Romans. Even so, the influence of these texts clearly continued into the first few centuries CE.

The influence of 1 Maccabees can be seen in chapter 11 of the so-called “Epistle to the Hebrews” found in the New Testament. Also of unknown authorship and date, Hebrews is a curious document that, although circulated among Paul’s writings and described as a letter, defies the usual epistolary conventions. Indeed, it strikes most modern commentators as having more in common with sermons than letters. Buchanan describes it as a “homiletical midrash,” and his evocation of Jewish exegetical traditions is appropriate. Although Hebrews is a Christian apologetic text, it is also fundamentally a Jewish text written for other Jews. Chapter 11 is famous for the author’s exhortation to his audience that it is “by faith our ancestors received approval” (Heb. 11:2).² He then proceeds to list individuals from biblical and Jewish history “who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight” (Heb. 11:33–34).

1 Daniel J. Harrington, *Invitation to the Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 122.

2 All biblical citations are the *New Revised Standard Version*, unless otherwise noted.

In commenting upon this list, scholars often refer to 1 Macc. 2 and Mattathias' dying exhortation to his sons that they "remember the deeds of the ancestors" (1 Macc. 2:51).³ Mattathias goes on to list great heroes from the Bible, from Abraham to Daniel, who all did mighty works and were zealous for the law and so gained honor. While the superficial similarities are obvious and contrasts between the two lists are sometimes made, what has gone unnoticed is the fact that Heb. 11 should be read *with and against* 1 Macc. 2. The author of Hebrews not only knew of this passage but also assumed his audience would know it as well. Bruce Chilton argued in a keynote paper presented at the 2013 meeting of the International Organization for Targumic Studies titled "Greek Testament, Aramaic Targums, and the Question of Comparison" that it is important to consider comparisons, not because they are determinative, but rather because they are suggestive. In the following pages, I will offer a reading of both passages and suggest that, while the author of Hebrews is not slavishly following the earlier text, he is intentionally drawing a contrast and is doing so as part of his larger theological argument that faith, in terms of both belief and perseverance, is necessary to salvation.⁴

Before we begin this study a brief note is perhaps appropriate regarding why I have not included Sirach 44–50 and the Wisdom of Solomon 10 in this comparison. There are certainly similarities between these four texts that are worth examining,⁵ but where 1 Macc. 2 and Heb. 11 share key traits to be analyzed below, Sirach and Wisdom are distinct from both. In the case of Sirach we find a true encomium, praising the individuals without explicitly offering them as examples to be emulated. Wisdom 10 is yet another sort of text. In it "wisdom" is personified and presented as the savior, the agent by which God brought about his preserving work in his people Israel. Wisdom is the active agent rather than being something, like faith or great deeds, that the reader is to have or exhibit. The genre, style, and theology is something altogether different than what is found in either 1 Macc. 2 or Heb. 11.

3 See Michael R. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11 in Light of Example Lists in Antiquity* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988) and Pamela Michelle Eisenbaum, *The Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in Literary Context* (SBLDS 156; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

4 This is, perhaps, in disagreement with Cockerill's view (*Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], p. 516): "The pastor has not made use of a preexisting Jewish or Jewish-Christian example list as earlier commentators sometimes suggested."

5 See Eisenbaum, *The Jewish Heroes*.

1 **1 Maccabees 2:49–65**

The opening chapters of 1 Maccabees are designed to place the actions of the Hasmoneans in line with other great figures of the Bible in order to show that they were divinely appointed to drive out the pagan and apostate alike and to restore proper worship in the Temple. Chapter 1 establishes the historical context including the rise to power not only of the “sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes,” but also of certain “renegades from Israel” who led many astray. The chapter concludes, however, by stating that many remained firm in their obedience to the “holy covenant,” even to their deaths. The stage is thus set for the introduction of the primary figures led by the patriarch, “Mattathias son of John son of Simeon, a priest of the family of Joarib.”

The author of 1 Maccabees presents Mattathias as an idealized biblical patriarch. He is a prophet and judge all in one. His first words are a lament reminiscent of Isa. 1:4–9, and he is a leader recognized by the enemy and respected by his people. Mattathias is decisive, declaring that he and his sons and brothers will all obey the covenant even if the whole world should stand against them and then proceeding to kill an apostatizing Jew on the altar the Gentiles have set up. According to 1 Macc. 2:26, “Thus he burned with zeal for the law, just as Phinehas did against Zimri son of Salu.” However, his dedication to the Law is practical as well. When he sees pious Jews killed for their refusal to fight on the Sabbath, he declares that survival is more important than Sabbath observance so that they will fight against any who attack them, even on the Sabbath (1 Macc. 2:41).

The author of 1 Maccabees presents Mattathias as the example his sons are to follow: one dedicated to God and his covenant with Israel, yet a savvy and able leader. His credentials as a patriarch are further solidified when he offers his deathbed exhortation to his sons followed by a blessing upon them.⁶ This final speech also serves to place the rebellion of Mattathias and his followers into the larger framework of Israel’s covenantal history.

Mattathias’ speech opens, “Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name” (1 Macc. 2:51). This exhortation sets the agenda and tone for what follows. While “faith” and “belief” will play a role in the list of 1 Macc. 2, the focus is primarily upon (1) the actions the heroes took and (2) the role of such actions in assuring that they were remembered as great men of Israel. As we

6 See Gen. 49.

shall see later, this is in contrast with Hebrews' primary concern for future reward rather than temporal success and fame.

The exhortation is presented as a list of eleven famous biblical figures who remained committed to God's covenant even in difficult and, in some cases, life-threatening times. The list is terse with each figure receiving barely more than an allusion. The audience is expected to know the stories well and to be able to make the appropriate connections.

The list begins, "Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?" (1 Macc. 2:52). This is an obvious place to start, and Mattathias needs to say no more. The specific reference to his faith being "reckoned to him as righteousness" is clearly drawn from Gen. 15:6, when God promised Abraham that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars: "And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness." Yet the reference to Abraham's being tested also brings to mind Gen. 22, when God commands Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Together, these events represent the complete Abrahamic cycle, which is characterized by his willingness to do as God commands, from leaving his homeland to offering his heir as a human sacrifice. He believed God's promises and acted upon them.

The author next moves to Joseph, who "in the time of his distress kept the commandment and became lord of Egypt" (1 Macc. 2:53). Again, the audience would be very familiar with the story of Joseph's rise to prominence in Egypt and, specifically, his rejection of the sexual overtures of Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:6ff). Idolatry is often referred to as adultery in the Hebrew Bible, and Joseph's rejection of her amorous advances would serve as an added reminder to the audience of the importance of remaining faithful to the Lord, rejecting the allure of false gods. Mattathias is reminding his sons that remaining true to the covenant, even in the face of dire consequences, such as Joseph's imprisonment, will ultimately lead to blessing, just as God blessed Joseph so that he eventually became second only to Pharaoh.

In 1 Macc. 2:54, we find out that zeal for the law runs in the family: "Phinehas our ancestor, because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood." The reference to "our ancestor" (ὁ πατήρ ἡμῶν) is not simply a general term, as with Abraham. Rather Mattathias is apparently descended from this famously zealous priest, and this lineage likely inspired the actions of Mattathias in 1 Macc. 2:24.

The author then moves through Israel's history to the examples of Joshua and Caleb. This account of Joshua becoming a "judge" in Israel is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. However, as Goldstein points out, it is "probably

to foreshadow the career of Mattathias' son Jonathan, who paralleled the feats of Joshua and then became a Judge."⁷ In a similar manner, Judas' faith that they could win a war against one of the largest empires in the world is parallel to Caleb's faith that the land of Canaan would be given into the hands of God's people (Num. 13:30).

In 1 Macc. 2:57, we are told that "David, because he was merciful, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever." Whether we translate ἐν τῷ ἐλέει with the NRSV as "because he was merciful" or follow Goldstein and translate it as "for his piety,"⁸ the passage is enigmatic as it stands. Although David is praised throughout Scripture and tradition, there are not great and defining moments of mercy or piety. Perhaps the author has in mind David's mercy towards Saul in 1 Sam. 24:1–7, where David spares Saul's life, but such a passage can also be read as cunning strategy. Certainly David is the exemplar of an Israelite king, and it is not surprising that he should be in this list of ancestors who received "great honor and an everlasting name."

The author moves from king to prophet in 1 Macc. 2:58: "Elijah, because of great zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven." As a prophet, Elijah spent his life calling Israel back to the law and rebuking the kings of Israel. When King Ahab married Jezebel and began to worship Baal, God sent Elijah to tell of the impending drought. As a result of his stand for the law against Ahab and Jezebel, he was forced to flee into the wilderness. These are the images that the author encourages his audience to call to mind when remembering Elijah's commitment to the law. The comparisons to the life of Mattathias and his sons are obvious. They too have "fled to the hills" because they have spoken against the evil rulers of their day, and, like Elijah, they too will be blessed by God if they remain zealous for the law.

The examples of the next two verses give us additional insight into the author's view of acculturation: "Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. Daniel, because of his innocence, was delivered from the mouth of the lions" (1 Macc. 2:59–60). Audiences now, as then, are familiar with Daniel's three friends who were thrown into the fiery furnace for refusing to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's idol. Yet they continued to worship the Lord even when they knew their lives were surely forfeit. God saved them and sent an angel to guard over them in the furnace. It is interesting to note that 1 Maccabees is consistent in not using the young men's Babylonian names

7 Jonathan Goldstein, *1 Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 41; Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), p. 240.

8 Ibid.

(Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego), as we find in the biblical account. Instead the author refers to them only by the Hebrew names, Hannaniah, Azariah, and Mishael. This choice seems to be a further critique of assimilation on the part of the author of 1 Maccabees and a reaction to the current trend of Hellenized Jews taking on Greek names.

Mattathias' final example of faithfulness is Daniel himself.⁹ The hero remained committed to both God and his king, Darius, and so his enemies were jealous (Dan. 6:4). According to the text, they tried "to find grounds for complaint against Daniel in connection with the kingdom. But they could find no grounds for complaint or any corruption, because he was faithful." In fact, Daniel was so righteous that the only way they could find fault in him was to have the king make the act of prayer to any god other than Darius illegal. Daniel was thus innocent of disobeying God's law even as he broke the king's law. The parallel to Mattathias and his family is clear, and it serves as a fitting close to Mattathias' exhortation.

The final words of Mattathias are a blessing upon his sons Simeon and Judas Maccabeus that foreshadows their greatness and completes the image of Mattathias as a patriarch, bringing to mind Jacob's final words and blessings for his sons in Gen. 49. 1 Maccabees is designed to explain and justify the rise of the Hasmoneans. This passage, 1 Macc. 2:49–70, serves as the conclusion to the first section of the book, which outlines the crisis that necessitated the rebellion, initially led by Mattathias. It also provides the final planks of the Hasmonean platform, showing that their authority grew out of their obedience to the Law, their resolve not to compromise the covenant, and their standing in the history of other great heroes of the Bible. God has lifted up Mattathias for just this time, and Mattathias is passing along to his sons not only the leadership of the rebellion but also the moral imperative that they remain true to God: "My children, be courageous and grow strong in the law, for by it you will gain honor" (1 Macc. 2:64). Taken with 1 Macc. 2:51 ("Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name"), these two verses form an *inclusio* and make it clear that God will be faithful to those who are faithful to him and that their reward will be to receive honor and an everlasting name. It is important to keep the framing of this list in 1 Maccabees in mind as we turn now to Heb. 11, a very similar list with similar methods, but a very different objective.

9 A.J. XII.279–284.

2 Hebrews 11

As noted in the introductory comments, 1 Macc. 2 is often listed by commentators of Heb. 11 as one of many examples of literary lists in antiquity.¹⁰ Yet to the best of my knowledge, no thorough comparison has been made between the two lists. The fact that 1 Maccabees was likely well-known in the first century CE,¹¹ the reference, albeit oblique, to the martyrs of 2 Macc. 7 in Heb. 11:35,¹² and the similarity of the two lists certainly merit additional attention. Our previous verse-by-verse analysis of 1 Macc. 2 will serve as the basis for our comparative investigation from this point forward.

While the author of 1 Maccabees opens and concludes Mattathias' exhortation with the call to obedience to the law for the sake of achieving honor, the author of Hebrews begins with a definition: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." A complete discussion of the use of πίστις in Hebrews is beyond the scope of this study.¹³ The author does, however, make it clear that he understands "faith" to mean a belief in things that have not yet occurred that leads one to action.¹⁴ As we consider the similarities between Heb. 11 and 1 Macc. 2, one commonality that emerges is the focus upon action. In 1 Macc. 2 the heroes are praised for the deeds they committed in obedience to God and the covenant, just as the heroes in Heb. 11 are moved by their faith. Yet there is also a marked difference. Whereas the author of 1 Maccabees is concerned with the impact he and his sons will make *in this world* in opposing the enemies of God and his covenant with Israel, the author of Hebrews is focused upon the rewards that the followers of Christ will receive *in the world to come*. As Cockerill puts it, "These heroes have a faith that anticipates God's future, made available through his Son."¹⁵

10 Cosby, *Rhetorical Composition*, pp. 93ff.

11 See the now old, yet still very reasonable, arguments put forward in William Reuben Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus: An Inquiry into Jewish Nationalism in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), pp. 125ff.

12 George Wesley Buchanan, *To the Hebrews* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), p. 203.

13 See, for example, Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, pp. 182ff. and Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 520.

14 See Heb. 11:6. Cockerill (*Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 520–521) makes some important points regarding the subjectivity and objectivity of how one translates ὑπόστασις and ἔλεγχος. The effect is the same, however, and our interpretation ought to be directed by the larger context of Heb. 11. Clearly in context and in each example, "faith" is actualized in action, yet it cannot be ignored that in verse 2 we are told it is "by faith our ancestors received approval."

15 *Ibid.*, p. 526.

The author introduces this section by announcing that “indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval.” Although he takes a step back in Heb. 11:3 to consider the role of faith in our knowledge of creation,¹⁶ the author then moves quickly to listing various heroes whose status as such was due to the faith they exhibited. As in 1 Macc. 2, the audience is to consider those heroes who went before as a means of encouraging the current generation to follow their example. In this case, it is *πρεσβύτεροι* (“elders”) rather than the *πατέρων* (“fathers”) of 1 Macc. 2:51, perhaps because the list in Hebrews includes women as well.

The author of 1 Maccabees is concise, taking no more than a simple sentence to refer to each hero and their deeds. In Hebrews, however, we find a list that is far more detailed and expansive. The author never loses sight of his agenda that “faith” is the determining factor in acceptance before God. For example, the author answers the puzzling question of why Abel’s sacrifice was accepted and Cain’s was not. It was faith. And then following the LXX version of Gen. 5:24, the author tells us that Enoch did not die but was taken by God because he “pleased God” (*καὶ εὐηρέστησεν Ἐνωχ τῷ θεῷ*).

This example provides deeper insight into the author’s understanding of faith as he tells the audience that even “pleasing God” is an act of faith: “And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6). Central to the author’s argument is that one “must believe that [God] exists.” Any action that is taken, in this case seeking, approaching, or pleasing God, can only be done after one has faith, that is, the belief that God exists. This conception of faith as a requirement for action is key to the theology of Heb. 11. Thus, according to this text, Noah built the ark based upon God’s warnings alone, before the “events as yet unseen” (Heb. 11:7), Abraham accepted God’s promises to be true and acted accordingly (Heb. 11:8), and so on.

The examples of Abel and Enoch also establish the author’s emphasis upon the rewards of faith being not temporal, but eternal. As we move through the list, we will see that, while some will receive partial reward for their faithfulness in this world, the fullness of the reward occurs only after Christ has come and this life is over. As Cockerill succinctly puts it, “All, like Abel, will die without receiving the fullness of what God has promised. All, like Enoch, are promised triumph over death.”¹⁷ Again, this is in contrast with 1 Macc. 2 where the reward for faithfulness to the law is “honor and an everlasting name” not ever-

16 “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.”

17 *Ibid.*, p. 526.

lasting life. Rather, these rewards are things achievable in this world even if, or perhaps especially if, the faithful lose their lives for their obedience.¹⁸

This is not to suggest that the author of Hebrews is not concerned that his audience should *also* do great deeds and be obedient to God in this life. As mentioned above, the author of Hebrews presents faith as evident in the actions of the faithful. There is, of course, a long and deep history of debate surrounding faith and the law in the New Testament, and it is not my intent to enter into such treacherous waters. Yet the contrasting approaches of Heb. 11 and 1 Macc. 2:49ff. should be noted, particularly because they share such similarities. An audience who knew 1 Maccabees would hear the words of Hebrews as building upon that earlier argument and getting behind it. The author of Hebrews is arguing that what *motivates* one to do deeds in keeping the law is vitally important and, in turn, should alter one's expectations of reward.

In Heb. 11:7, Noah is introduced, and we move into a slightly different tone. Noah acted on God's warning, and in so doing he saved his household and "condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith." While the language of Heb. 11:7 regarding Noah's "condemnation of the world" may seem strong to modern readers, the authors of both 1 Maccabees and Hebrews understood their world in this way: to remain faithful to God meant being a testimony against those who did not keep the faith (each author, of course, understanding that in their own way). In 1 Maccabees, Mattathias, like his ancestor Phinehas, stands in apposition to apostates, not only bringing their actions of disobedience to light by contrast with their own obedience to the law, but even going so far as to personally bring the judgment of death upon them. Mattathias tells his sons, "Today [sinners] will be exalted, but tomorrow they will not be found, because they will have returned to the dust, and their plans will have perished" (1 Macc. 2:63). Through Noah, the author of Hebrews presents the argument that those who believe in the promises of God "condemn the world" through the acknowledgement that "the world" is *not* acting in faith. For both authors, there is a clear dichotomy between those who follow God and those who do not.

The next section, Heb. 11:8–22, is an extended narrative on the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with a passing reference to Joseph. It is told

18 Though it is beyond the scope of this study, it is interesting to note the fact that, while 2 Maccabees emphasizes the hope of the resurrection, 1 Maccabees does not bring this forward as a reward or goal at all. See, for example, the death cry of the fourth son martyred (2 Macc. 7:14): "When he was near death, he said, 'One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!'"

primarily through the lens of Abraham's life. Whereas 1 Macc. 2:52 makes a simple one sentence allusion to Abraham's faithfulness, Hebrews considers several moments in his life. Throughout this section, the author of Hebrews furthers his argument that the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises are not to be found in this world, even as God provides other miraculous rewards. Thus, even as Abraham was blessed with Isaac and their descendants swelled and even as Joseph "by faith" expected the Exodus and the occupation of the promised land, we are told that "they desire[d] a better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Heb. 11:16).

Where we might expect to find examples of actions by the Patriarchs that are to be emulated, the author of Hebrews instead transforms the very real, this-world promises of children and land into a lesson about the world to come. Of course, none of the Patriarchs lived to settle permanently in Canaan, yet the author of Hebrews tells us that this was never really their ultimate destination:

9 By faith [Abraham] stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. . . . 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

For the audience of Hebrews, whether living in Judea or not, the message is clear that God's promise is not simply of land, which can be taken away by force. Rather it is the promise of eternal life in a heavenly land, prepared and protected by God.

This teaching stood in contrast not just to the stories of military success of 1 Maccabees wherein the Promised Land is reclaimed by the divinely appointed Hasmoneans, but also in contrast with those of the first century who sought to drive out the Roman occupiers. The message of Hebrews is not that God cannot provide such deliverance but that the faithful should not expect to receive it in this world. According to Heb. 11:39–40, "Even though these all were attested through their faith, they did not receive the promise, because God had prepared something better for us, so that they might not be perfected apart from us."¹⁹

19 Translation from Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 596. For discussion of how these passages relate to the specific question of the resurrection, see Gareth Lee Cockerill, "The Better Resurrection (Heb. 11:35): A Key to the Structure and Rhetorical Purpose of Hebrews 11," *TynBul* 51 (2000), pp. 215–234.

Hebrews 11:23–31 takes us from the Exodus through the Conquest, detailing certain key moments in Moses' life and the signature victory at Jericho. πίστει is the operational term throughout. It is “by faith” that Moses' parents hid him, that he rejected the riches of Egypt, and so on. What ties this section together is not only the time period covered but also the nature of their “faithful acts.” The following section shares this trait as well. The author of Hebrews is now conveying to his audience the importance of standing up against earthly enemies, even at the risk of losing one's life. Even though 1 Macc. 2:54–56 covers much the same period, Hebrews does not refer to the acts of Phinehas, Joshua, and Caleb as 1 Macc. 2 does. It is unlikely, as suggested earlier, that Hebrews is borrowing directly from 1 Macc. 2, and this difference further supports that position.²⁰ Yet this section is much closer to the theme of 1 Macc. 2 than previous verses. The authors of both passages are using the examples of their ancestors to encourage their audiences to stand firm against the powers of the day.

In the final section of Heb. 11, the author runs rapidly through scores of named and nameless heroes who similarly remained faithful to God and “through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.” The details of such accounts are set aside as the author piles up the results of their faith in an ascending list of accomplishments. These first three verses (Heb. 11:32–35) are almost at odds with the earlier assertions that the reward to be expected is life in the heavenly realm—not rewards of this world. The list includes military success, deliverance from lions and the fiery furnace, and overall worldly victory. It is reminiscent of the statement in 1 Macc. 2:61 that “from generation to generation . . . none of those who put their trust in him will lack strength.” And perhaps that is the reason for the terse treatment of these heroic acts. In their examples, there was rescue and reward, and that did not fit well with the author's emphasis upon future fulfillment. The next four verses, however, speak to the hardships and loss of this world, hardship and loss that apparently the author's audience understands and have themselves endured (Heb. 10:32ff).

Heb. 11:35 is a significant shift in the chapter, and this transition is marked by the movement from named heroes to unnamed “women” who “received their dead by resurrection.” If we are looking for a biblical antecedent, the only likely candidates are the sons of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs. 17:17–24) and the Shunammite (2 Kgs. 4:18–37).²¹ It is possible, however, that the author has some

²⁰ See Cosby, *Rhetorical Function*.

²¹ See Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 590 and Buchanan, *To the Hebrews*, pp. 202–203.

other tradition, now lost to us, in mind. The second half of the verse is just such an non-canonical example: “Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection.” This is almost certainly a reference to the martyrs described in 2 Macc. 6–7 and refers to a resurrection beyond the “resuscitation” experienced by the sons in the biblical accounts. With this allusion, the author moves to a litany of torment inflicted upon believers. The suffering was extreme, even when not leading to death, and yet in their extreme condition the author says that “the world was not worthy” of them (Heb. 11:38). Even so, the author tells us temporal reward was not to be found:

Even though these all were attested through their faith, they did not receive the promise, because God had prepared something better for us, so that they might not be perfected apart from us.²²

This returns us to the author’s primary theme. It is by faith that the promise will be fulfilled, but that fulfillment remains a future event. Recall that Heb. 11 is part of a larger exhortation to a community under persecution and that the author’s message is crafted to encourage the members of this community so that they might not lose hope. According to Heb. 10:36 and 39, “For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. . . . But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved.” This is why we find such a stark difference between the message of 1 Macc. 2 and Heb. 11: Hebrews could no longer afford the view of 1 Maccabees. Looking back to successes of the past would not satisfy a community that had seen and was currently experiencing persecution and hardship with no earthly compensation. The glories of the past had to be replaced with the hope of the future. The author concludes this line of his argument in the opening to Heb. 12:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.²³

22 Heb. 11:39–40. Translation from Cockerill, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 596.

23 Heb. 12:1–2.

Recalling the testimony of those who have gone before, the author exhorts his audience to look ever forward, continuing to press on without expectation of reward in this life but assured of a life to come.

3 Conclusions

These two passages obviously have certain similarities. Both contain lists of biblical figures who are considered meritorious. Both are designed to encourage their audience to remain faithful to God, despite all opposition, and even in times of persecution. And both hold up as evidence of the worth of these individuals and the acts they accomplished in the name of God.

Yet there are differences too. The author of 1 Maccabees emphasizes the importance of accomplishing such deeds and being zealous for the law. Having done so, their names will be remembered, and they will be accorded great honor. For the author of Hebrews, the law is no longer operative (Heb. 8:13), and his focus is upon faith rather than deeds (even if they are the natural result of having such faith). The reward for having faith is not to be found in this world (even if in some cases God does bless his people with success), but it is the assurance of a place in the heavenly city built by God. These similarities and differences are quite striking.

Of course, it cannot be proved decisively that the author of Hebrews had 1 Macc. 2 in mind when writing his list. It is reasonable, however, to assume that his audience was aware of 1 Maccabees, especially when one considers the reference to 2 Macc. 7 and the fact that the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) was celebrated in the first century CE. It is useful then to read these two texts alongside one another. As Chilton has suggested, comparisons need not only be about derivations and causality; we need not expect direct relationships. Comparisons such as the above can also illuminate and illustrate so that a well-known text can be understood in a new light, suggesting nuances and meanings that perhaps were more obvious to the original audience than they are to later readers. When Heb. 11 is read against the backdrop of 1 Macc. 2, the author's emphasis upon faith and the deferred gratification of the resurrection is brought into greater relief. This reading does not create a dichotomy that is not already present, but rather places Hebrews within the larger setting of Jewish exhortations to a community in crisis. In doing so, it clarifies the author's distinctive choices and their effect on crafting the theology of an emerging messianic movement.