

TRACES OF THE FIRST BOOK OF MACCABEES IN THE EPISTLES OF ST PAUL

THE qualities of a good historian which characterized the unknown author of the First Book of Maccabees, and the undoubted merits of his work seemed to guarantee that the history of the Maccabean Revolt would survive for long, and would furnish material for the study of the conditions then prevailing in Judaea and in the south of Seleucia in the second century B.C.

When, however, the Pharisees had forgotten the Maccabean heroes and neglected the history of their efforts (I Maccabees), it might have been feared that the work would perish in spite of the merits which distinguished it. It was moreover written in Hebrew, a knowledge of which was rather rare in the ancient world. Yet it was saved. It was translated into Greek by the Hellenist Jews, probably in Alexandria, and included in their canon of sacred books. The Church took it over as a religious work, and together with other books of Holy Scripture, had it copied and made known.

When searching for the earliest traces of a knowledge of the Books of Maccabees in ancient literature, we come across some quotations in St Clement of Alexandria¹ and St Hippolytus.²

Josephus Flavius also, in Books 12 and 13 of his Antiquities, took much material from I Maccabees, very often repeating what is there given with only slight alterations. Later, however, from the time of the appearance of the book shortly after the death of Simon Maccabeus in 135 B.C.³ till the writing of the Jewish Antiquities by Josephus Flavius in Rome, i.e. till the thirteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Domitian in A.D. 93-4, we have no evidence to prove that the book was known. It seems, however, that traces of a knowledge of I Maccabees are to be found in St Paul's epistles, and if so, the period mentioned above would be shortened by about forty years.

The often-repeated phrase in St Paul, *καὶ ἐπίστευσεν Ἀβραάμ καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην*⁴, which occurs in I Maccabees,⁵ is rather a quotation from the Book of Genesis⁶ both in I Maccabees and in St Paul's epistles. It cannot therefore be considered as an indication that St Paul made use of I Maccabees.

¹ Stromata I ; 21, 123, P.G., 9, 145.

² Fragm. 32, P.G., 10, 661.

³ F. Gryglewicz, Paradoxes of the First Book of Maccabees, SCRIPTURE, IV, 1950, 199 n.

⁴ Romans iv, 3, 9, 22, 23. Galatians iii, 6. James ii, 23.

⁵ I Macc. ii, 52.

⁶ Genesis xv, 6.

Among the documents, however, given in I Macc. is the verbatim text of the letter of Jonathan Maccabeus to the Spartans. The purpose of this letter is the renewal of friendship between the two peoples. Jonathan assures the Spartans that it is not military aid that he seeks, for 'we would not be troublesome to you, nor to the rest of our allies' and friends, in these wars. For we have had help from heaven.⁷

No other necessity moreover compels them to renew their friendship. In all needs 'we . . . (have) for our comfort the holy books that are in our hands'.⁸ As the friendship had been formed long before when Ares I was king of Sparta (309-265 B.C.) and Onias I was Archpriest of Jerusalem (322-300 B.C.), it had lapsed, and the Jews were reminded of it only by documents. They thought it proper therefore 'to send to you (the Spartans) to renew the brotherhood and friendship, lest we should become strangers to you altogether'.⁹ Jonathan then assures them: 'We, therefore, at all times without ceasing, both in our festivals, and other days wherein it is convenient, remember you in the sacrifices which we offer, and in our observances, as it is meet and becoming to remember brethren'.¹⁰

Jonathan's very assurance of prayers for the Spartans must have stuck in St Paul's memory, as the assurances of prayers for the friends to whom he addresses his epistles are expressed in almost the same words as those used by the author of I Maccabeus. At the beginning of his first epistle to the Thessalonians, St Paul assures them that he always makes mention of them in his prayers and thanks God for them all. He remembers, without ceasing, their work of faith and labour of love, and patience of hope.¹¹

This phrase in the Greek text recalls that of Jonathan in the letter to the Spartans. Both letters speak of prayers, using the same word προσευχαί. Both letters make assurance of remembrance, with this difference that I Maccabeus uses the word μνησκόμεθα, which is seldom used by St Paul, who substitutes two expressions that are phonetically very much akin to the word, namely μνημονεύοντες and the descriptive μνείαν ποιούμενοι. Finally, the assurance of the unceasing remembrance in prayers is based on the consecutive synonymous expressions in I Macc. ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ and ἀδιαλείπτως, where St Paul changes ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ (the literal translation of the Hebrew b'kol 'eth for the more frequently used παντότε although this was later condemned by the Atticists, Phrynichus¹² and Moeris.¹³

⁷ I Macc. xii, 14-15.

⁸ I Macc. xii, 10.

⁹ I Macc. xii, 10.

¹⁰ I Macc. xii, 11.

¹¹ I Thess. i, 2.

¹² W. G. Rutherford, London, 1881, No. 82.

¹³ Ed. J. Pierson, Leyden, 1759, p. 139 P.

The assurance of prayers, with which St Paul begins his first epistle, is repeated in his other letters, each instance being characterized by the use of words which we remember in the letter of Jonathan in I Macc. At the beginning of the Epistle to the Romans, after introducing himself to readers personally unknown to him, and who were famed for their deep faith, St Paul acknowledges, 'For God is my witness . . . that without ceasing I make a commemoration of you, always, in my prayers, making request . . .'¹⁴ At the beginning of the Epistle to the Ephesians St Paul writes that he ceases not to give thanks for them, making commemoration of them in his prayers.¹⁵

To Philemon also he makes assurance at the beginning of his epistle, 'I give thanks to my God, making commemoration of thee in my prayers'.¹⁶ Finally, in prison, he writes to Timothy that without ceasing he has a remembrance of him in his prayers, night and day.¹⁷

In all these places, apart from the same subject matter which in both I Macc. and St Paul requires the use of the same phrase ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς or ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου and μνησκόμεθα ὑμῶν μνησάντων ὑμῶν ποιοῦμαι the word πάντοτε is constantly repeated, and also the word, seldom met with, ἀδιαλείπτως¹⁸. Especially striking, however, is the use of both the first and the second of the words under discussion in the same sentence in I Macc. and also in St Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians and to the Romans, although the words are differentiated by only a fine shade of meaning, and their juxtaposition is not necessitated by the contents. The author of I Macc. placed the words one immediately after the other, thus directing the attention of every reader to them. St Paul also uses them consecutively, but not immediately one after the other. Here also, however, these two words in one sentence are not necessary since leaving out one or other of them would not change the sense, beyond stressing the unceasing remembrance in prayers, which was probably the concern of both authors. Thus it is just this unnecessary arrangement of two words with the same meaning in the same sentence, and furthermore the fact that one of these two words is

¹⁴ Romans i, 9.

¹⁵ Ephesians i, 16.

¹⁶ Philemon. iv.

¹⁷ Timothy i, 3. Here also may be recalled the encouragement to prayer at the end of the Epistle to the Ephesians (vi, 18).

¹⁸ This word is only used in (besides I Maccabees): Metrodorus (Papyrus Herculaneensis 831, ed. A. Körte, *Jahrbücher für klassische Philologie*, Suppl. XVII, Leipzig, 1890); Polemo Historicus 30 (ed. C. Müller, *Fragm. Hist. Gr.* III, Paris, p. 124); Polybius 9, 3, 8 (668) (ed. T. Büttner-Wobst, Leipzig, 1893, p. 4. Posidonius, 25 (ed. C. Müller, *Fragm. Hist. Gr.* III, Paris, 1853, p. 261) and in the papyrus 1166, 6, from London (ed. F. G. Kenyon-H. I. Bell, *Greek Papyri in the British Museum*, Vol. III, London, 1893 ss.).

seldom used,¹⁹ besides other points of similarity, i.e., the same thought and the same phrases mentioned above, that is an indication for us that St Paul had read I Macc. and that the phrase which stuck in his memory would be repeated in almost the same words.

Surveying the similarities and differences of these few expressions which have helped us to prove the dependence of St Paul on I Macc., we cannot fail to remark that the differences may easily be explained without reference to the Hebrew. Besides the similarities which we have already discussed, attention should further be drawn to the fact that the word derived from δέομαι in our text is only met with once, and then only after προσευχαί in the quotation from the epistle to the Romans, but just where in I Macc. there is a similar expression ὡς δέον ἐστι.

This slight observation after all we have hitherto discussed especially relating to the word ἀδιαλείπτως and its position beside πάντοτε, is for us one more indication that St Paul did not translate afresh from the Hebrew but read the Greek text of I Macc. in the translation which we now possess. He had read this before he wrote the first epistle to the Thessalonians, i.e. at the beginning of his first stay in Corinth, which probably took place in A.D. 51.

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¹⁹ St Paul uses the general word ἀδιαλείπτως, four times, and ἀδιάλειπτον twice.