

Did the Avot Observe the Commandments?

Festivals

Jubilees 6:16. He set His bow in the cloud for a sign of the eternal covenant that there should not again be a flood on the earth to destroy it all the days of the earth. 17. For this reason it is ordained and written on the heavenly tables, that they should celebrate the feast of weeks in this month once a year, to renew the covenant every year. 18. And this whole festival was celebrated in heaven from the day of creation till the days of Noah-twenty-six jubilees and five weeks of years: and Noah and his sons observed it for seven jubilees and one week of years, till the day of Noah's death, and from the day of Noah's death his sons did away with (it) until the days of Abraham, and they ate blood. 19. But Abraham observed it, and Isaac and Jacob and his children observed it up to thy days, and in thy days the children of Israel forgot it until ye celebrated it anew on this mountain.

Jubilees 22:1 And it came to pass in the first week in the forty-fourth jubilee, in the second year, that is, the year in which Abraham died, that Isaac and Ishmael came from the Well of the Oath to celebrate the feast of weeks.

Agricultural Laws

Jubilees 7:34 And now, my [Noah's] children, harken: work judgment and righteousness that ye maybe planted in righteousness over the face of the whole earth, and your 35 glory lifted up before my God, who saved me from the waters of the flood. And behold, ye will go and build for yourselves cities, and plant in them all the plants that are upon the earth, and moreover 36 all fruit-bearing trees. For three years the fruit of everything that is eaten will not be gathered: and in the fourth year its fruit will be accounted holy [and they will offer the first-fruits], acceptable before the Most High God, who created heaven and earth and all things. Let them offer in abundance the first of the wine and oil (as) first-fruits on the altar of the Lord, who receives it, and 37 what is left let the servants of the house of the Lord eat before the altar which receives (it). And in the fifth year make ye the release so that ye release it in righteousness and uprightness, and ye shall be righteous, 38 and all that you plant shall prosper. For thus did Enoch, the father of your father command Methuselah, his son, and Methuselah his son Lamech, and Lamech commanded me all the things 39 which his fathers commanded him. And I also will give you commandment, my sons, as Enoch commanded his son in the first jubilees.

Purity Laws

Jubilees 3:8 In the first week was Adam created, and the rib -his wife: in the second week He showed her unto him: and for this reason the commandment was given to keep in their defilement, 9 for a male seven days, and for a female twice seven days. And after Adam had completed forty days in the land where he had been created, we brought him into the garden of Eden to till and keep it, but his wife they brought in on the eightieth day, and after this she entered into the garden 10 of Eden. And for this reason the commandment is written on the heavenly tablets

Sacrificial Laws

Testament of Levi 9:3-5 And when we came to Bethel, my father Jacob saw in a vision concerning me, that I should be to them for a priest unto the Lord; and he rose up early in the morning, and paid tithes of all to the Lord through me. And we came to Hebron to dwell there, and Isaac called me continually to put me in remembrance of the law of the Lord, even as the angel of God showed to me. And he taught me the law of the priesthood, of sacrifices, whole burnt-offerings, first-fruits, free-will offerings, thank-offerings.

Exceptions

Jubilees 33:15 And let them not say: to Reuben was granted life and forgiveness after he had lain with his father's concubine, and to her also though she had a husband, and her husband 16 Jacob, his father, was still alive. For until that time there had not been revealed the ordinance and judgment and law in its completeness for all, but in thy days (it has been revealed) as a law of 17 seasons and of days, and an everlasting law for the everlasting generations.

Damascus Document

CD 3:2 אברהם לא הלך בה ויעל אֹהב בשמרו מצות אל ולא בחר
CD 3:3 ברצון רוחו. וימסור לישחק וליעקב וישמרו ויכתבו אוהבים
CD 3:4 לאל ובעלי ברית לעולם. [[]] בני יעקב תעו בם ויענשו לפני
CD 3:5 משגותם. ובניהם במצרים הלכו בשרירות לבם להיעץ על
CD 3:6 מצות אל ולעשות איש הישר בעיניו ויאכלו את הדם.

Rabbinic Literature

משנה מסכת קידושין פרק ד

וכן הוא אומר באברהם אבינו עליו השלום (בראשית כ"ד) ואברהם זקן וה' ברך את אברהם בכל מצינו שעשה אברהם אבינו את כל התורה כולה עד שלא נתנה שנאמר (בראשית כו: ה) עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקולי וישמור משמתי מצותי חקותי ותורותי:

בראשית רבה (תיאודור-אלבק) פרשה מט

[וי"י אמר המכסה אני מאברהם אשר אני עושה וגו'] רבנין א' כבר קראתי אביהן כי אב המון גויים נתתיך (בראשית יז ה) דנין את הבן חוץ מדעתו שלאב, גיהינם גיליתי לו, מתן תורה גיליתי לו, דינה שלסדום איני מגלה לו. ר' אחא בשם ר' אלכסנדר ר' שמואל בן נחמן בשם ר' יונתן אפילו הילכות עירובי חצירות היה אברהם יודע, ר' פנחס ר' חלקיה ר' סימון בשם ר' שמואל אפילו שם חדש שהקב"ה עתיד לקראות לירושלם ביום ההוא יקראו לירושלם כסא י"י (ירמיה ג יז) אברהם היה יודע, ר' ברכיה ר' חייה (אמ"י) רבנין דתמן בשם ר' יהודה אין כל יום ויום שאין הקב"ה מחדש הלכה בבית דין שלמעלה מאי טע"י שמעו שמוע ברוגז קולו והגא מפיו יצא (איוב לו ב) ואין הגא אלא דברי תורה כמה דאת אמר והגית בו יומם ולילה (יהושע א ח), אפילו אותו היה אברהם יודע.

Shemot Rabbah 30:9

Another explanation of 'He declared His word unto Jacob' (Ps 147:19). R. Abbahu, in the name of R. Jose b. Hanina, said: It can be compared to a king who had an orchard in which he planted all kinds of trees and in which only he entered, because he was its keeper. When his children became of age, he said: 'My children, hitherto I guarded this orchard, not allowing any to enter it. I want you now to look after it as I did.'

This is what God said to Israel: 'Prior to My creation of the world, I prepared the Torah, for it says, Then I was by Him, as a nursling'-amon (Prov. 7:30). What is the meaning of 'amon'?-'a tutor,' as it says, As a nursing father (omen) carrieth the sucking child (Num. 11:12). I did not give it to the heathen, but to Israel, who, as soon as they responded-'All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and obey' (Ex. 24:7)-were given the Torah. Hence, 'He declares His word unto Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances unto Israel.'

He hath not dealt so with any nation (Ps. 147:20), only with Jacob, whom He chose from all the heathen people, giving to the latter only part [of the Commandments]. He gave Adam six Commandments, and added one to Noah, Abraham had eight and Jacob nine, but to Israel He gave all.

I Maccabees 1:11 In those days there appeared in Israel men who were breakers of the law, and they seduced many people, saying: "Let us go and make an alliance with the Gentiles all around us; since we separated from them, many evils have come upon us."

4 Maccabees 5

[1] The tyrant Antiochus, sitting in state with his counselors on a certain high place, and with his armed soldiers standing about him, [2] ordered the guards to seize each and every Hebrew and to compel them to eat pork and food sacrificed to idols. [3] If any were not willing to eat defiling food, they were to be broken on the wheel and killed. [4] And when many persons had been rounded up, one man, Eleazar by name (cf. II Macc. 6:18-31), leader of the flock, was brought before the king. He was a man of priestly family, learned in the law, advanced in age, and known to many in the tyrant's court because of his philosophy. [5] When Antiochus saw him he said, [6] "Before I begin to torture you, old man, I would advise you to save yourself by eating pork, [7] for I respect your age and your gray hairs. Although you have had them for so long a time, it does not seem to me that you are a philosopher when you observe the religion of the Jews. [8] Why, when nature has granted it to us, should you abhor eating the very excellent meat of this animal? [9] It is senseless not to enjoy delicious things that are not shameful, and wrong to spurn the gifts of nature. [10] 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. [11] 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, [12] and have compassion on your old age by honoring my humane advice? [13] For consider this, that if there is some power watching over this religion of yours, it will excuse you from any transgression that arises out of compulsion."

[14] When the tyrant urged him in this fashion to eat meat unlawfully, Eleazar asked to have a word. [15] When he had received permission to speak, he began to address the people as follows: [16] "We, O Antiochus, who have been persuaded to govern our lives by the divine law, think that there is no compulsion more powerful than our obedience to the law. [17] Therefore we consider that we should not transgress it in any respect. [18] Even if, as you suppose, our law were not truly divine and we had wrongly held it to be divine, not even so would it be right for us to invalidate our reputation for piety. [19] Therefore do not suppose that it would be a petty sin if we were to eat defiling food; [20] to transgress the law in matters either small or great is of equal seriousness, [21] for in either case the law is equally despised. [22] You scoff at our philosophy as though living by it were irrational, [23] but it teaches us self-control, so that we master all pleasures and desires, and it also trains us in courage, so that we endure any suffering willingly; [24] it instructs us in justice, so that in all our dealings we act impartially, and it teaches us piety, so that with proper reverence we worship the only real God. [25] "Therefore we do not eat defiling food; for since we believe that the law was established by God, we know that in the nature of things the Creator of the world in giving us the law has shown sympathy toward us. [26] He has permitted us to eat what will be most suitable for our lives, but he has forbidden us to eat meats that would be contrary to this. [27] It would be tyrannical for you to compel us not only to transgress the law, but also to eat in such a way that you may deride us for eating defiling foods, which are most hateful to us. [28] But you shall have no such occasion to laugh at me, [29] nor will I transgress the sacred oaths of my ancestors concerning the keeping of the law, [30] not even if you gouge out my eyes and burn my entrails. [31] I am not so old and cowardly as not to be young in reason on behalf of piety. [32] Therefore get your torture wheels ready and fan the fire more vehemently!