

2 MACCABEES

Persecutory laws

6¹After a while, the king sent an older Athenian to force the Jews to abandon their ancestral laws and no longer live according to the laws of God. ²And to have them also profane the temple in Jerusalem and dedicate it to the *Olympian god*. In the same way, he wanted them to dedicate the temple in Mount Gerizim to the *hospitable god*, according to the wishes of the inhabitants of the place.

Martyrdom of Eleazar

¹⁸Eleazar, one of the prominent teachers of the Law, already old and of noble appearance, was forced to open his mouth to eat the flesh of a pig. ¹⁹But he preferred to die honorably than to live in disgrace, and voluntarily came to the place where they beat him to death. He spit out bravely the piece of meat, ²⁰as should be done by those who do not want to do things prohibited by the Law, even to save their life.

²¹Those in charge of this impious banquet took him aside, since they had known him for a long time, and tried to convince him to pretend to be eating the meat, but in reality, to eat something allowed by the Law and prepared by himself. ²²In this way, he could escape death, and be treated with humanity for the sake of their long-time friendship.

²³But he preferred to make a noble decision worthy of his age, of his noble years, of his shining white hair, and of the irreproachable life he had led from childhood. Above all, showing respect for the holy laws established by God, he answered that he would rather be sent to the place of the dead. And he added:

²⁴—It would be unworthy to pretend at our age, and to lead many young people to suppose that I, at ninety years, have gone over to the pagan customs. ²⁵If I led them astray for the sake of this short life I would bring disgrace to my old age. ²⁶Even if I could now be saved from mortals, I cannot—whether living or dead—escape from the hands of the Almighty. ²⁷I prefer to bravely sacrifice my life now, as befits my old age. ²⁸So I shall leave an excellent example to the young, dying voluntarily and valiantly for the sacred and holy laws.

Having said this, he gave himself over to death.

²⁹Those who escorted him considered his words foolishness, so their previous gentleness turned into harshness.

³⁰When he was almost at the point of death, he said groaning:

—The Holy Lord, who sees all, knows that though I could have saved myself from death, I now endure terrible sufferings in my body. But in my soul, I suffer gladly because of the respect I have for him.

³¹In his death, he left a noble example and a memorial of virtue and strength, not only to the young but to the whole nation.

The seven brothers and their mother

7¹It happened also that seven brothers were arrested with their mother. The king had them scourged and flogged to force them to eat the flesh of a pig which was prohibited by the Law.

²One of them, speaking in behalf of all, said:

—What do you want to find out from us? We are prepared to die right now rather than break the law of our ancestors.

³The king became furious and ordered that pans and caldrons be heated over a fire. ⁴When these were red-hot, he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out, his head scalped, and his hands and feet cut off while his brothers and mother looked on.

⁵When he had been thoroughly mutilated, the king ordered that while still breathing, he be brought to the fire and roasted alive. While the smoke from the pan spread widely, the other brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die bravely. And they said:

⁶—The Lord God sees all, and in reality, has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song, and clearly said:

—The Lord will have pity on his servants.

⁷When the first had left the world in this way, they brought the second for execution. After stripping the skin with the hair from his head, they asked him:

—Which do you prefer: to eat the flesh of a pig or to be tortured limb by limb?

⁸He answered them in the language of his ancestors:

—I will not eat.

And so he, too, was tortured.

⁹At the moment of his last breath, he said:

—Murderer, you now dismiss us from life, but the King of the world will raise us up. He will give us eternal life since we die for his laws.

¹⁰After this, they punished the third. He stuck his tongue out when asked to, bravely stretched forth his hands, ¹¹and even had the courage to say:

—I have received these limbs from God, but for love of his laws I now consider them as nothing. For I hope to recover them from God.

¹²The king and his court were touched by the courage of this young man, so unconcerned about his own sufferings.

¹³When this one was dead, they subjected the fourth to the same torture. ¹⁴At the point of death, he cried out:

—I would rather die at the hands of mortals, and wait for the promises of God who will raise us up; you, however, shall have no part in the resurrection of life.

¹⁵They took the fifth at once and tortured him. But with his eyes fixed on the king, ¹⁶he said to him:

—Though you are mortal, you have authority over people and are able to do what you will. But do not think that our race has been abandoned by God. ¹⁷Wait, and you shall see his great power when he torments you and your descendants.

¹⁸After this, they took the sixth who, at the point of death, said:

—Don't be mistaken. We suffer all this because of ourselves for we have sinned against our own God; so these astonishing things have come upon us. ¹⁹But do not think that you are going to remain unpunished, after having made war with God.

²⁰More than all of them, their mother ought to be admired and remembered. She saw her seven sons die in a single day. But she endured it even with joy for she had put her hope in the Lord. ²¹Full of a noble sense of honor, she encouraged each one of them in the language of their ancestors. Her woman's heart was moved by manly courage, so she told them:

²²—I wonder how you were born of me; it was not I who gave you breath and life, nor I who ordered the matter of your body. ²³The Creator of the world who formed man in the beginning

and ordered the unfolding of all creation shall in his mercy, give you back breath and life, since you now despise them for love of his laws.

²⁴Antiochus thought that she was making fun of him and suspected that she had insulted him.

As the youngest was still alive, the king tried to win him over not only with his words, but even promised to make him rich and happy, if he would abandon the traditions of his ancestors. He would make him his Friend and appoint him to a high position in the kingdom. ²⁵But as the young man did not pay him any attention, the king ordered the mother to be brought in. He urged her to advise her son in order to save his life. ²⁶After being asked twice by the king, she agreed to persuade her son. ²⁷She bent over him and fooled the cruel tyrant by saying in her ancestral language:

—My son, have pity on me. For nine months I carried you in my womb and suckled you for three years; I raised you up and educated you until this day. ²⁸I ask you now, my son, that when you see the heavens, the earth and all that is in it, you know that God made all this from nothing, and the human race as well. ²⁹Do not fear these executioners, but make yourself worthy of your brothers—accept death that you may again meet your brothers in the time of mercy.

³⁰When she finished speaking, the young man said:

—What are you waiting for? I do not obey the king's order but the precepts of the Law given by Moses to our ancestors. ³¹And you who have devised such tortures against the Hebrews, shall not escape the hands of God. ³²Know that we perish because of our sins. ³³Our living Lord punishes and corrects us for a short time because he is angry with us, but he shall again be reconciled with his servants.

³⁴And you, the most wretched and impious man, do not be proud or be carried away by your vain hopes. Do not raise your hand against the children of Heaven, ³⁵for you have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty God, who sees everything. ³⁶Our brothers suffered a short time for the sake of eternal life and have already entered into the friendship of God. But you, for your part, shall suffer the punishment you deserve for your arrogance.

³⁷With my brothers, I give up my body and my soul for the laws of my fathers, calling on God that he may at once have pity on our race, and that by trials and afflictions, you may come to confess that he is the only God. ³⁸Through me and my brothers, may the wrath of the Almighty which has justly fallen on the whole of our race come to an end.

³⁹The king was even more infuriated at him than at the others because of his mockery and he dealt more cruelly with him. ⁴⁰So the youngest also died undefiled, putting his whole trust in God.

⁴¹After all her sons, the mother also died.

⁴²This is enough to make known what happened regarding the pagan sacrifices and the tortures beyond all imagination.

New deeds of Judas

12 ³⁸Judas reorganized his army, and then went to the city of Adullam. Since it was the week's end, they purified themselves and celebrated the sabbath there. ³⁹The next day the companions of Judas went to take away the bodies of the dead (it was urgent to do it) and buried them with their relatives in the tombs of their fathers. ⁴⁰They found under the tunic of each of the dead men objects consecrated to the idols of Jamnia, which the Law forbade the Jews to wear. So it became clear to everyone why these men had died.

⁴¹Everyone blessed the intervention of the Lord, the just Judge who brings to light the most secret deeds; ⁴²and they prayed to the Lord to completely pardon the sin of their dead companions.

The valiant Judas urged his men to shun such sin in the future, for they had just seen with their own eyes what had happened to those who sinned. ⁴³He took up a collection among his soldiers which amounted to two thousand pieces of silver and sent it to Jerusalem to be offered there as a sacrifice for sin.

They did all this very well and rightly inspired by their belief in the resurrection of the dead. ⁴⁴If they did not believe that their fallen companions would rise again, then it would have been a useless and foolish thing to pray for them. ⁴⁵But they firmly believed in a splendid reward for those who died as believers; therefore, their concern was holy and in keeping with faith.