

## Week 34, Lecture 106.<sup>1</sup> The Persecution Begins.

**Review.** In the last lecture we read the description of persecution in 1 Maccabees.

The author devotes about a dozen verses to the event (1 Macc 1:52-64).

2 Maccabees will devote 2 full chapters to the horrors of the persecution (2 Maccabees 6 and 7).

Before beginning this section of his narrative, the author has begun the story of Judas Maccabeus (2 Macc 5:27).

This gives the reader a “ray of hope,” during the extended narrative we now begin.

### Introduction: This is a Two Part Lecture

1) 2 Macc 6:1-11, a description of the situation, a “factual,” if emotional description of events;

2) 2 Macc 6:12-17, the editor’s comment to the readers

### Literary Genre: Martyrology, Martyr Stories

Martyr stories are filled with **highly charged emotional rhetoric** in which the opposition between the martyrs and their opponents is driven home again and again.<sup>2</sup>

Doran also gives other examples of such literature in Jewish and pagan sources.

### Pagan Worship Imposed on Jerusalem, 2 Macc 6:1-11

**Introduction, verses 1-3.** Not long after this, the king sent an **Athenian senator** to compel the Jews to forsake the laws of their fathers and cease to live by the laws of God,<sup>2</sup> and also to pollute the temple in Jerusalem and call it the temple of **Olympian Zeus**, and to call the one in Gerizim the temple of **Zeus the Friend of Strangers**, as **did** (*etunchanon*) the people who dwelt in that place.<sup>3</sup> Harsh and utterly grievous was the onslaught of evil.<sup>3</sup>

**Motivation?** Again, no motivation given. There are many scholarly hypotheses.

Collins suggests that the unrest we read about in chapter 5 (the Apollonius incident) had not been fully put down.

A related question is why Antiochus was not satisfied with the Jewish observance in Jerusalem.

After all, his appointee, Menelaus, who had paid him a large bribe, was still the high priest!

### Athenian (?) Senator (?)

Some versions and manuscripts say that he was from **Antioch**, rather than Athens.

Antioch **was** the Seleucid king’s base of operations when he was in this part of his empire.

The Vulgate, translated literally by the Douay, reads “a certain **old man** of Antioch.”

This would be the normal translation, taking *geronta* as the accusative form of *gerōn*, “old man.” Cf. “gerontology.”

*Gerōn* is not the normal word for “senator.” Josephus uses *sunklētikos*<sup>4</sup> or paraphrases, “one of the council.”

NJB translates “Gerontes the Athenian.” This makes *geronta* the accusative of a proper name *Gerontēs*.

Doran renders it “Geron the Athenian,” taking *geronta* as the accusative of the proper name “*Gerōn*.”<sup>5</sup>

Bottom line: it is not at all certain: 1) who this man was; 2) where he was from; 3) what his position was.

**Olympian Zeus.** It is not clear that this HAD to be interpreted as a pagan god.

Some Jews might have regarded this as another name for the LORD, their God.

We know that some Jews of the second century BCE were prepared to take such a liberal attitude. The Letter of Aristeas, a document from Egyptian Judaism roughly contemporary with 2 Maccabees says **that the God of the Jews is the God whom all peoples worship, though the Greeks name him Zeus.**<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lectures are numbered consecutively. Although this is this week's first lecture, its number reflects its place in the **total** sequence.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Doran, “The Second Book of Maccabees,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 242.

<sup>3</sup> All scripture quotes are from the RSV, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>4</sup> Nine times. Greek search conducted using BibleWorks.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Doran, *2 Maccabees: A Critical Commentary*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Fortress, 2012), 133.

Earlier Israelites had no problem identifying **El Elyon** the deity of the pagan Melchizedek with their own God.

They assumed that “**God Most High**” (Gen 14:18) was another name for the LORD, Yahweh.

The genitive (possessive) case of *Zeus* is *Dios* -- see the relationship to *Deus* the Latin word for “God.”

### Contemporary Analogy

Can Christians pray to “Allah?” Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem and Nazareth pray in Arabic.

Whenever our lector in English reads “God,” the Christians in these towns (and all Arabic speakers) hear “Allah.”

Consider the reaction of American Catholics if a new parish were named “Divine Mercy Church.”

Now consider the reaction if the government insisted that it be called “The Church of Allah Most Merciful.”

All Catholics would be upset at such government interference.

Some would think this was an issue worth dying for.

Others would not be happy, but would think that they could live with it.

Catholics in an Arab-speaking country would not understand what the problem was.

### Zeus the Friend of Strangers

It is also possible to translate this as “Zeus the Hospitable,” or “Zeus the [Good] Host.”

“**as did the people who dwelt in that place.**” (RSV, NRSV). The Greek is obscure.

This translation suggests that the people of Samaria went along more willingly than those of Judea.

Some translations alter the text to read “**as the people of the place had petitioned**” (NETS, NJB, & old NAB)

This interprets the obscure line by a reference from Josephus, who mentions a request.<sup>7</sup>

Then it would be a slap at the Samaritans for actually making a request, rather than simply submitting.

“**as the local inhabitants were wont to be**” (NABRE) is yet another possible translation.

This follows Jerome’s Vulgate, rendered by the Douay “according as they were that inhabited the place.”

This translation actually praises the people of Samaria for their hospitality.

That is, they name the Temple “God/Zeus, the Hospitable” because they themselves prize this virtue.

**The General Situation, verses 4-9.** <sup>4</sup> For the temple was filled with debauchery and reveling by the Gentiles, who dallied with harlots and had intercourse with women within the sacred precincts, and besides brought in things for sacrifice that were unfit. <sup>5</sup> The altar was covered with abominable offerings which were forbidden by the laws. <sup>6</sup> A man could neither keep the sabbath, nor observe the feasts of his fathers, nor so much as confess himself to be a Jew. <sup>7</sup> On the monthly celebration of the king's birthday, the Jews were taken, under bitter constraint, to partake of the sacrifices; and when the feast of Dionysus came, they were compelled to walk in the procession in honor of Dionysus, wearing wreaths of ivy. <sup>8</sup> At the suggestion of Ptolemy a decree was issued to the neighboring Greek cities, that they should adopt the same policy toward the Jews and make them partake of the sacrifices, <sup>9</sup> and should slay those who did not choose to change over to Greek customs. One could see, therefore, the misery that had come upon them.

### “dallied with harlots”

Cult prostitution was forbidden by Deut 23:17. King Rehoboam was considered evil for allowing it (1 Kgs 14:24).

Doran regards this as one of several “stereotypical accusations” against pagan religion.<sup>8</sup>

### Religious Actions Required

Partake of the sacrifices on the emperor’s monthly birthday

Walk in the procession of Dionysius, wearing wreaths of ivy in honor of the Greek god.

This is not a question of “belief.” It is demanding participation in **civic observances**.

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<sup>6</sup> Collins, *Daniel, 1-2 Maccabees*, 301.

<sup>7</sup> The request is actually that the Temple be named for “Hellene Zeus” or “Jupiter Hellenius” (*Antiquities* 12.261, via Bibleworks)

<sup>8</sup> Robert Doran, “The Second Book of Maccabees,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 4 (Abingdon, 1994–2004), 232.

1 Macc 1:52 reports that “many” of the Jews were glad to participate in these observances.

The author of 2 Maccabees clearly considers such Jews as renegades who have abandoned their religion. Consider the contemporary response when athletes do not stand to take part in our national anthem.

Have they “abandoned patriotism?”

Or have those who claim to be patriots “abandoned concern for justice?”

Often such questions are not as clear in “real life” as partisans of either side would claim.

### Post-Lecture Note. I meant to comment on Ptolemy.

It is not certain **which** Ptolemy this is, the king of Egypt, or some other person with the name.

Also some translations read “Ptolemais,”<sup>9</sup> a city which corresponds to Akko, which is the modern city of Acre.

It is located in the NW of modern Israel. This is not a reference to empire-wide persecution of Jews.

Rather, the concern is that the Jews of Jerusalem not avoid the king’s command by going to nearby cities.

**Concrete Example #1** .<sup>10</sup> For example, two women were brought in for having **circumcised their children**. These women they publicly paraded about the city, with their babies hung at their breasts, then hurled them down headlong from the wall.

Contrast this with 1 Maccabees 1:60-61

According to the decree, they put to death **the women** who had their children circumcised, <sup>61</sup> and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mothers' necks.

The language of 2 Maccabees is clearly more calculated to appeal to the **emotions** of the reader.

1 Maccabees refers to (all) “the women” who had their babies circumcised.

2 Maccabees refers to “**two (specific) women**” and gives **more graphic** details of their barbaric treatment.

The women, and their dead infants, are “publicly paraded” through the city; then “thrown down headlong.”

This characteristic of his style will be on display throughout chapters 6 and 7.

**Concrete Example #2** .<sup>11</sup> Others who had assembled in the caves near by, to observe the **seventh day** secretly, were betrayed to Philip and were all burned together, because their piety kept them from defending themselves, in view of their regard for that most holy day.

Sabbath Piety prevented them from resisting.

We will see that Judas and his men decide that they can no longer follow this dictate of the Torah.

Was the faith of the martyrs naïve? Or did Judas and his men “sell out” and adopt Gentile ways to oppose Gentiles?

### Editorial Comment

**2 Macc 6:12-17**. Now I urge those who read this book not to be depressed by such calamities, but to recognize that these **punishments** were designed not to destroy but to **discipline** our people. <sup>13</sup> In fact, not to let the impious alone for long, but to punish them immediately, is a sign of **great kindness**. <sup>14</sup> For **in the case of the other nations** the Lord waits patiently to punish them until they have reached the full measure of their sins; but he does not deal in this way with us, <sup>15</sup> in order that he may not take vengeance on us afterward when our sins have reached their height. <sup>16</sup> Therefore he never withdraws his **mercy** from us. Though he **disciplines** us with calamities, he does not forsake his own people. <sup>17</sup> Let what we have said serve as a reminder; we must go on briefly with the story.

**My Comments.** The author’s theology is **Deuteronomistic**. He regard the persecution as **punishment** for Israel’s sins. Deuteronomy and the DH (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings) portray God rewarding fidelity & punishing infidelity. Paradoxically, this swift punishment of Israel is a form of **great kindness**.

If God waited for more sin the punishment would be more severe.

I think we have to admit that there are problems with this “explanation.”

What kind of a God allows babies to be killed in order to “teach their parents” piety?

Might some other hermeneutic of suffering be more appropriate to our own age?

Furthermore, not all Jewish authors agree in the sharp distinction between God treatment of Jews and **other nations**.

Doran notes that Wisdom 11:1-14 portrays God as allowing Gentiles time to repent.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> E.g., Douay, NJB, NAB, NABRE, NRSV. All these are following Jerome’s Vulgate.

## Week 34, Lecture 107. The Martyrdom of Eleazar, 2 Macc 6:18-31.

### Introduction

**2 Macc 6:18-23.** Eleazar, one of the scribes in high position, a man now **advanced in age** and of noble presence, was being forced to open his mouth to eat swine's flesh. <sup>19</sup> But he, welcoming **death with honor** rather than life with pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, spitting out the flesh, <sup>20</sup> as men ought to go who have the courage to refuse things that it is not right to taste, even for the natural love of life. <sup>21</sup> **Those who were in charge** of that unlawful sacrifice took the man aside, because of **their long acquaintance** with him, and privately urged him to bring meat of his own providing, proper for him to use, and pretend that he was eating the flesh of the sacrificial meal which had been commanded by the king, <sup>22</sup> so that by doing this he might be saved from death, and be treated kindly on account of his old friendship with them. <sup>23</sup> But making a high resolve, worthy of his years and the dignity of his old age and the gray hairs which he had reached with distinction and his excellent life even from childhood, and moreover according to the holy God-given law, he declared himself quickly, telling them to send him to Hades.

### Eleazar is “advanced in age.”

This contrasts with the infants slain in the previous passage, as well as with the young martyrs in chapter 7.

**Death with Honor.** This is a major theme of this story.

Somewhat ironically, this is a trait Eleazar shares with the Greek Achilles.

Death with honor is preferable to life with disgrace.<sup>11</sup>

**Those who were in charge.** These are described as having a **long acquaintance** with the 90-year old.

Is it possible that at least some of them were fellow Jews?

### Eleazar's Speech

**6:24-28a.** "Such pretense is not worthy of our time of life," he said, "lest many of the young should suppose that Eleazar in his **ninetieth year** has gone over to an alien religion, <sup>25</sup> and through my pretense, for the sake of living a **brief moment longer**, they should be led astray because of me, while I defile and **disgrace** my old age. <sup>26</sup> For even if for the present I should avoid the punishment of men, **yet whether I live or die I shall not escape** the hands of the Almighty. <sup>27</sup> Therefore, by manfully giving up my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age <sup>28</sup> and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws."

### Speech.

Part of the literary form employed by the author is that each martyr **gives a speech** shortly before he dies.

The **only** exception is the martyr in chapter 7 whose tongue is cut out, who gives his speech early.

This speech **reflects the editorial perspective** of the author of 2 Maccabees.

The speeches are not stenographic records of what was said on the occasion.

They have been composed by the author of 2 Maccabees.

**90<sup>th</sup> year.** This makes more specific the phrase “advanced age” of verse 18.

Since Eleazar is so old, his apostasy would gain only a “**brief moment**” of life.

However, in another sense, even many decades of life is a “brief moment.”

Eleazar's reasoning reminds readers that the choice is not between “life” and “death.”

It is a choice between “death now” or “death later.”

The main question is: will it be death **with honor** or death **with shame**?

### “Whether I live or die, I shall not escape . . .”

This story does not stress reward and punishment after death. The main theme is honor vs. dishonor.

However, the commentators agree that Eleazar seems to look forward to some form of future life.

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<sup>10</sup> Doran, “Second Maccabees,” *NIB*, 4. 234.

<sup>11</sup> See Collins, *Daniel, 1-2 Maccabees*, 306.

Eleazar's insistence that he can escape from the Almighty neither alive nor dead suggests that the author accepted the notion of reward or punishment after death.<sup>12</sup>

Eleazar expresses a belief that the soul survives and receives retribution after death, but he says nothing here of resurrection.<sup>13</sup>

Collins is less definite. He says simply that the statement "may imply" belief in some kind of afterlife<sup>14</sup>.

### The Result

**6:28b-30a.** When he had said this, he went at once to the rack.<sup>29</sup> And those who a little before had acted toward him with good will now changed to ill will, because the words he had uttered were in their opinion **sheer madness**.<sup>30</sup> When he was about to die under the blows, he groaned aloud and said:

### Sheer Madness.

...while 2 Maccabees 6 does not make explicit the hope of afterlife, Eleazar has values which transcend death, and which are unintelligible to his tormentors.<sup>15</sup>

### Eleazar's last words

**6:30b.** "It is clear to the Lord in his holy knowledge that, though I might have been saved from death, I am enduring terrible sufferings in my body under this beating, but **in my soul** I am glad to suffer these things because I fear him."

It is not clear whether Eleazar has a Greek view of the soul -- which considers it to be immortal,

Or whether he has the traditional Hebrew view of the soul, that it is fragile and perishable.

The main force of Eleazar's final words are his conviction that he has been loyal to God.

The editor reinforces this points with his final remark.

### Editor's Final Remark

**6:31.** So in this way he died, leaving in his death an example of nobility and a memorial of courage, not only to the young but to the great body of his nation.

## Week 34, Lecture 108a. The Seven Brothers & Their Mother Part One, 2 Macc 7:1-6

**Emotional History.** As in chapter 6, the author's aim is to arouse the emotions of his readers.

The main theological points come in the **speeches** of the dying martyrs. They reflect the author's theology of martyrdom. These are not stenographic records of what was said on a particular occasion.

I thought of leaving out the "gory details" in my reading to concentrate on the theology.

However, I think this would be to over-intellectualize the material.

The **artistic effect** is the result not only of the author's theology, but also of his "gory details."

**2 Macc 7:1** 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.<sup>16</sup>

In this chapter we hear the story of a mother and her seven sons. The father is never mentioned -- perhaps she is a widow.

**Swine's flesh.** The swine's flesh is a symbolic food, explicitly forbidden by the Mosaic Law.

Many contemporary Jewish theologians do not think this law is binding under pain of death.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Doran, *2 Maccabees: A Critical Commentary*, Hermeneia (Fortress, 2012), 153.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 41A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 287.

<sup>14</sup> Collins, *Daniel, 1-2 Maccabees*, 305.

<sup>15</sup> Collins, *Daniel, 1-2 Maccabees*, 306.

<sup>16</sup> All scripture quotes are from the RSV unless otherwise noted.

**The King.** The presence of the **king** has caused commentators to wonder if this happened in Antioch.

History records no other visits of Antiochus to Jerusalem after the one recorded in 2 Maccabees chapter 5. It is probably for dramatic effect that the king himself is portrayed as present at the trial.

**NT Analogy.** Similar questions have been raised about the details of the trial of Jesus in the NT accounts.

In the Synoptics, Jesus is silent. Is this “prophecy historicized?” Or is it “history remembered?”

**Isaiah 53:7.** He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

“Prophecy historicized” = creating a narrative for the NT from an OT passage (when the writer has no accurate info).

“History remembered” = the writer recalls events that remind him of the OT passage.

All scholars agree the NT contains **both** “prophecy historicized” and “history remembered.”

More conservative scholars put the emphasis on “history remembered” (e.g., Raymond Brown).

More radical scholars put the emphasis on “prophecy historicized” (e.g., John Dominic Crossan).

**NT Analogy -- John.** In John, by contrast, Jesus is loquacious, and confounds Pilate in their dialogue.

Historical Jesus scholars think that if Pilate and Jesus had a conversation, it would have been through an interpreter.

I almost fell out of my chair in Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* when Pilate spoke directly to Jesus in Latin.

In *ecclesiastical* Latin, giving “*Quid fecisti?*” [What have you done?] the Italian pronunciation.

This tells us more about the Gibson’s Latin advisor -- probably a Catholic cleric -- rather than history.

### **The First Brother**

**7:2-6.** 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." <sup>3</sup> **The king fell into a rage, and gave orders that pans and caldrons be heated.** <sup>4</sup> **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.** <sup>5</sup> **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,** <sup>6</sup> [read as a chorus] "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.'"

**Fonts.** The speeches are in a black font. The “gory details” are in a blue font.

This will help visualize the relative amounts of each as the story proceeds.

**Die Rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.** This is the main theological point the author is making.

It is his response to Hellenization in general, and the demands of Antiochus in particular.

**The King’s Rage.** The king is portrayed as “out of control,” in contrast to the calm dignity of the martyrs.

### **The Pre-Death Speech**

Part of the torture of the first brother is the cutting out of his tongue; he has only a brief remark at the beginning.

In this instance the “final speech” is given by the brother and mothers **as a chorus.**

In Greek tragedy, the chorus alerts the audience to the significance of what is occurring on the stage.

Somewhat ironically, our anti-Hellenistic author makes powerful use of Hellenistic drama and rhetoric.

The choral statement is a proclamation of faith in the face of darkness and horror.

**Lecture Division. The lecture went longer than I expected. I divided it here.**

## Week 34, Lecture 108b. The Seven Brothers & Their Mother Part Two, 2 Macc 7:7-19 .

### The Second Brother

7:7-9. After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. They tore off the skin of his head with the hair, and asked him, "Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?" <sup>8</sup> He replied in the language of his fathers, and said to them, "No." Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done. <sup>9</sup> And when he was at his last breath, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe **will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life**, because we have died for his laws."

**"Will Raise us up."** This is a clear reference to the hope of resurrection from the dead.

Previously (e.g., Ezekiel's vision of the Dry Bones) resurrection has been used as **corporate metaphor**.

God's people returning from exile will be **like** bones being clothed with sinews & flesh, and given spirit. This is a clear reference to the resurrection of individuals.

### The Third Brother

7:10-12. After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, <sup>11</sup> and said nobly, "I got these from **Heaven**, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him **I hope to get them back again**." <sup>12</sup> As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

**Heaven.** This is short for "the God of Heaven," a phrase that also occurs in Daniel (2:18,19,37,44).

In grammar school, sister used to say "Heaven help you if . . ." more reverent than saying "God help you if . . ."

### "Get Them Back Again."

The book of Daniel, also written about this time, gives the first clear instance of belief in individual resurrection

Indeed Daniel 12:1-3 is the **only** such reference in the entire Hebrew Bible

Several obscure passages in Job are generally rendered according to pious Christian thought.

Daniel compares the resurrected bodies to "heavenly matter." It is a **transformed** existence.

Jesus' remark to the Sadducees about the resurrected being "like the angels of God" (Mark 12:25) is in this vein.

The hope of the Maccabean martyrs appears to be much more physical.

He expects to get the very same tongue and hands back of which the king is about to deprive him.

### The Fourth Brother

7:13-14. When he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. <sup>14</sup> And when he was near death, he said, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him. **But for you there will be no resurrection to life!**"

**No Resurrection to Life.** This can be interpreted to mean that the king will "stay dead" for ever.

However in Daniel 12, the opposite of "**life**" is not "death" but "**shame and contempt**."

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to **everlasting life**, and some to **shame and everlasting contempt**. (Dan 12:2, RSV)

This meaning could also be intended here.

However, not all exegetes think Daniel is teaching the resurrection of ALL.

Some think he is describing only the fate of the **very good** (the martyrs), and the **very evil**.

### The Fifth Brother

7:15-17. Next they brought forward the fifth and maltreated him. <sup>16</sup> But he looked at the king, and said, "Because you have authority among men, mortal though you are, you do what you please. But do **not** think that God has **forsaken our people**. <sup>17</sup> Keep on, and see how **his mighty power will torture you and your descendants!**"

**Torture you and your descendants.** This need not refer to punishment in the afterlife.

2 Maccabees will record a (probably unhistorical) "tortured death" of Antiochus.

The torture for his descendants fits well into “traditional” Deuteronomistic theology.

If somebody has been very bad, and God is not finished punishing when they die, he takes it on on descendants. Corporate (gang) morality.

Besides, what other option was there before belief in individual resurrection?

### “Not . . . Forsaken Our People.”

In spite of the stress on the individual, the traditional **corporate imagery** of God’s people remains important.

### The Sixth Brother

**7:18-19.** After him they brought forward the sixth. And when he was about to die, he said, "Do not deceive yourself in vain. For we are suffering these things on our own account, **because of our sins** against our own God. Therefore astounding things have happened. <sup>19</sup> But **do not think that you will go unpunished** for having tried to fight against God!"

### “Because of our Sins.” Vicarious Suffering?

Commentators are divided as to whether this suffering is “vicarious” or not.

For it to be “vicarious” (them serving as “vicars” for those who deserve it) do they have to be **totally** innocent?

If so, the suffering is not vicarious.

“Our sins” could refer to their personal sins, or to the “collective guilt” of their people.

However, if the punishment they endure is **all out of proportion** to their personal sins, I think it is vicarious in a sense.

When “fairly pious” people are fried alive, I consider that to be “out of proportion” to what they deserve.

And I am certain God is way more merciful than I am!

## Week 34, Lecture 109. The Seven Brothers & Their Mother Part Three, 2 Macc 7:20-42

### The Mother’s First Speech

**7:20-23.** The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honorable memory. Though she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord. <sup>21</sup> She encouraged each of them in the language of their fathers. Filled with a noble spirit, **she fired her woman's reasoning with a man's courage, and said to them,** <sup>22</sup> "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. <sup>23</sup> Therefore the **Creator of the world**, who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy **give life and breath back to you again,** since you now forget yourselves **for the sake of his laws.**"

**Patriarchal, Sexist Remark.** . . . she fired her woman's reasoning with a man's courage . . .

As if female courage is somehow less than male courage! This author has never gotten too close to a bear cub!

**Creator of the World.** The mother’s faith is based ultimately on God’s creative power.

The same God who created us the first time can do it again.

### “Give Life and Breath Back to You.”

The mother’s image of resurrected life (like all of the martyrs of 2 Maccabees) is quite physical!

**For the Sake of His Laws.** Knowing this is what gives the mother courage to endure the death of her sons.

She does not see their deaths as “senseless” tragedies; but forfeiting life itself for a higher value.

For her there is no higher value than “his laws.”

### Antiochus and the Youngest Brother

**7:24-25.** Antiochus felt that he was being treated with contempt, and he was suspicious of her reproachful tone. The youngest brother being still alive, Antiochus not only appealed to him in words, but promised with oaths that he would make him rich and enviable if he would turn from the ways of his fathers, and that he would take him for his **friend**

and entrust him with public affairs. <sup>25</sup> Since the young man would **not listen to him at all**, the king called the mother to him and urged her to advise the youth to save himself.

### Portrait of Antiochus

The king has already been portrayed as being “out of control” in an undignified manner. Threats and punishment have been of no avail. Now he is reduced to **bribery**.

“**Friend**” is a technical term for a royal official.

The youngest brother “would not listen to him at all” -- another narrative slap at the king’s dignity. Since bribery has not worked, he is reduced to pleading with a woman.

**The Mother’s Second Speech, 7:26-29.** After much urging on his part, she undertook to persuade her son. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> 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.”

### “Have Pity on Me.”

She speaks in “their native tongue.” Possibly Hebrew, more likely Aramaic.

Antiochus does not understand her speech. This is why she can talk so long before being interrupted.

### “God did not make them out of things that existed” (RSV, NRSV)

God made them out of nothing, (Douay, a literal translation of Jerome’s Vulgate)

God made them of things that were not (KJV, Apocrypha)

God made them out of things that did not exist (NRSV marginal note)

God made them out of what did not exist, (NJB)

God did not make them out of existing things (NABRE)

God did not make them out of things that existed (NETS)

### Creation out of Nothing? Yes.

Collins refers to this as “perhaps the earliest Jewish formulation of the doctrine of creation out of nothing.”<sup>17</sup> Genesis, contrary to popular belief, does not teach creation *ex nihilo* “from nothing.”

### Creation out of Nothing? No.

Doran, however, argues that this is the same idea as found in Genesis

The text describes not making something out of nothing, but making order out of chaos.

She states that God did not create from what previously existed—i.e., as properly formed—but that God shaped the unformed world (see Gen 1:2, especially in the LXX). Christian writers and the Latin translator of 2 Maccabees took this to mean that God had created everything out of nothing (*ex nihilo*).<sup>18</sup>

### The Seventh (Youngest) Brother

**7:30-40.** While she was still speaking, the young man said, “What are you waiting for? I will not obey the king’s command, but I obey the command of the law that was given to our fathers through Moses. <sup>31</sup> But you, who have contrived all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, **will certainly not escape** the hands of God. <sup>32</sup> For we are suffering **because of our own sins**. <sup>33</sup> And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and **discipline** us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants. <sup>34</sup> But you, unholy wretch, you most defiled of all men, do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes, when you raise your hand against **the children of heaven**. <sup>35</sup> You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty, all-seeing God. <sup>36</sup> For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering **have drunk of everflowing life under God’s covenant**; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for

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<sup>17</sup> Collins, *Daniel, 1-2 Maccabees*, 312.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Doran, “The Second Book of Maccabees,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 242. He gives even more detailed arguments in his commentary in the Hermeneia series (p. 161).

your arrogance. <sup>37</sup> I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our fathers, appealing to God **to show mercy soon to our nation** and by afflictions and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, <sup>38</sup> and through me and my brothers to bring to an end **the wrath of the Almighty which has justly fallen on our whole nation.**" <sup>39</sup> The king fell into a rage, and handled him worse than the others, being exasperated at his scorn. <sup>40</sup> So he died in his integrity, putting his whole trust in the Lord.

**Note the ratio of “speech” to “gory details”.** The youngest brother’s speech is the climax of the narrative.

A Summary of the main points of previous speeches.

Antiochus will not escape punishment. The punishment is because of their own sins.

The wrath of the Almighty has justly fallen on the whole nation.

The punishment is God’s intention to **discipline** (not to **destroy**) his people. God will soon show mercy to his people.

The importance of loyalty to God’s covenant / laws.

**Those who have died “have drunk of everflowing life.”**

This could be taken as a hope that even before the final resurrection, they are enjoying some kind of life with God.

**Wisdom 3:1.** *But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them.*

OR: that the very act of dying nobly means they “have drunk of everflowing life under God’s covenant.

### **The Mother’s Death**

**7:41.** *Last of all, the mother died, after her sons.*

It is not surprising that the patriarchal author gives no details of the woman’s death.

### **Editor’s Final Comment**

**7:42.** *Let this be enough, then, about the eating of sacrifices and the extreme tortures*

Amen! We can stop here.