

# 2 Maccabees, Chapter 7

**Background:** After the death of Alexander the Great, the Jews were no longer under Persian Rule, but Greek rule. The Persians were famously tolerant of religious freedom but the Greeks were not, and their new rulers demanded that the Jews give up their ancestral laws, customs, and God, to adopt Greek customs and worship Greek gods. The Jews, consequently, had to choose between intense persecution and abandoning God. In order to stop this, many Jews banded together and revolted to overthrow their rulers, and this revolt was led by Judah Maccabee. Note that Maccabee is not his last name, it translates to “the Hammer”. Judah “the Hammer” refers to his fierceness in battle. The holiday of Hanukkah celebrates the victory of this revolt.

Note: This book is not in the Protestant Bible. It was in the Bible from the beginning, and Christians used it for 1500 years before it was taken out by Martin Luther. Catholics and Orthodox still use it to this day. There is a little bit more about this in the optional video on our website. If you only have a protestant Bible and wish to get these other sacred texts, send me an email or a text and I can happily get you a Catholic one! [youthandyoungadult@stfrancisbend.org/317-457-4992](mailto:youthandyoungadult@stfrancisbend.org/317-457-4992)

## *Martyrdom of a Mother and Her Seven Sons.*

1It also happened that seven brothers with their mother were arrested and tortured with whips and scourges by the king to force them to eat pork in violation of God’s law.<sup>2</sup>One of the brothers, speaking for the others, said: “What do you expect to learn by questioning us? We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors.”<sup>3</sup>At that the king, in a fury, gave orders to have pans and caldrons heated.<sup>4</sup>These were quickly heated, and he gave the order to cut out the tongue of the one who had spoken for the others, to scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of his brothers and his mother looked on.<sup>5</sup>When he was completely maimed but still breathing, the king ordered them to carry him to the fire and fry him. As a cloud of smoke spread from the pan, the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, with these words:<sup>6</sup>“The Lord God is looking on and truly has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song, when he openly bore witness, saying, ‘And God will have compassion on his servants.’”<sup>h</sup>

7After the first brother had died in this manner, they brought the second to be made sport of. After tearing off the skin and hair of his head, they asked him, “Will you eat the pork rather than have your body tortured limb by limb?”<sup>8</sup>Answering in the language of his ancestors, he said, “Never!” So he in turn suffered the same tortures as the first.<sup>9</sup>With his last breath he said: “You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up<sup>\*</sup> to live again forever, because we are dying for his laws.”<sup>c</sup>

10After him the third suffered their cruel sport. He put forth his tongue at once when told to do so, and bravely stretched out his hands,<sup>11</sup> as he spoke these noble words: “It was from Heaven that I received these; for the sake of his laws I disregard them; from him I hope to receive them again.”<sup>12</sup>Even the king and his attendants marveled at the young man’s spirit, because he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

13After he had died, they tortured and maltreated the fourth brother in the same way.<sup>14</sup>When he was near death, he said, “It is my choice to die at the hands of mortals with the hope that God will restore me to life; but for you, there will be no resurrection to life.”

15They next brought forward the fifth brother and maltreated him.<sup>16</sup>Looking at the king, he said:<sup>d</sup> “Mortal though you are, you have power over human beings, so you do what you please. But do not think that our nation is forsaken by God.<sup>17</sup>Only wait, and you will see how his great power will torment you and your descendants.”

18After him they brought the sixth brother. When he was about to die, he said: “Have no vain illusions. We suffer these things on our own account, because we have sinned against our God; that is why such shocking things have happened.<sup>19</sup>Do not think, then, that you will go unpunished for having dared to fight against God.”

20Most admirable and worthy of everlasting remembrance was the mother who, seeing her seven sons perish in a single day, bore it courageously because of her hope in the Lord.<sup>21</sup>Filled with a noble spirit that stirred her womanly reason with manly emotion, she exhorted each of them in the language of their ancestors with these words:<sup>22e</sup> “I do not know how you came to be in my womb; it was not I who gave you breath and life, nor was it I who arranged the elements you are made of.<sup>23</sup>Therefore, since it is the Creator of the universe who shaped the beginning of humankind and brought about the origin of everything, he, in his mercy, will give you back both breath and life, because you now disregard yourselves for the sake of his law.”

24Antiochus, suspecting insult in her words, thought he was being ridiculed. As the youngest brother was still alive, the king appealed to him, not with mere words, but with promises on oath, to make him rich and happy if he would abandon his ancestral customs: he would make him his Friend and entrust him with high office.<sup>25</sup>When the youth paid no attention to him at all, the king appealed to the mother, urging her to advise her boy to save his life.<sup>26</sup>After he had urged her for a long time, she agreed to persuade her

son.<sup>27</sup>She leaned over close to him and, in derision of the cruel tyrant, said in their native language: “Son, have pity on me, who carried you in my womb for nine months, nursed you for three years, brought you up, educated and supported you to your present age.<sup>28</sup>I beg you, child, to look at the heavens and the earth and see all that is in them; then you will know that God did not make them out of existing things.\* In the same way humankind came into existence.<sup>29</sup>Do not be afraid of this executioner, but be worthy of your brothers and accept death, so that in the time of mercy I may receive you again with your brothers.”

<sup>30</sup>She had scarcely finished speaking when the youth said: “What is the delay? I will not obey the king’s command. I obey the command of the law given to our ancestors through Moses.<sup>31</sup>But you, who have contrived every kind of evil for the Hebrews, will not escape the hands of God.<sup>32</sup>We, indeed, are suffering because of our sins.<sup>33</sup>Though for a little while our living Lord has been angry, correcting and chastising us, he will again be reconciled with his servants.<sup>34</sup>But you, wretch, most vile of mortals, do not, in your insolence, buoy yourself up with unfounded hopes, as you raise your hand against the children of heaven.<sup>35</sup>You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty and all-seeing God.<sup>36</sup>Our brothers, after enduring brief pain, have drunk of never-failing life, under God’s covenant. But you, by the judgment of God, shall receive just punishments for your arrogance.<sup>37</sup>Like my brothers, I offer up my body and my life for our ancestral laws, imploring God to show mercy soon to our nation, and by afflictions and blows to make you confess that he alone is God.<sup>38</sup>Through me and my brothers, may there be an end to the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation.”

<sup>39</sup>At that, the king became enraged and treated him even worse than the others, since he bitterly resented the boy’s contempt.<sup>40</sup>Thus he too died undefiled, putting all his trust in the Lord.<sup>41</sup>Last of all, after her sons, the mother was put to death.<sup>42</sup>Enough has been said about the sacrificial meals and the excessive cruelties.

1. Why does the mother keep encouraging her sons to die? Why do you think she doesn’t try to save their lives?
2. If you were the executioner of these brothers, how would you feel watching each one of them courageously die?
3. Very few of us are going to be called to be martyrs in our present Church. Still, we are always called to do what is right rather than what is easy. It would have been very easy for these men and their mother to forsake their traditions and worship Greek gods, but instead they chose to die rather than betray God. What little sacrifices can you make in

your day-to-day life to choose God rather than the easy way? Could you watch one less episode of your favorite TV show and take that time to pray the rosary? Go on a walk and listen to a podcast like *Pints with Aquinas* or *Word on Fire*? Take some time to think about how you can offer up little things in your life to the Lord.