

2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 9-14

This is a historical book that tells of the Jewish struggle for religious and political freedom from the Greek empire of the Seleucid kings who had inherited the world from Alexander the Great. The Maccabees are a Jewish family chosen by God to stand up against the tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes, who persecuted the Jews and blasphemously desecrated the temple. God's providence over history was keeping the nation of Israel alive, against all ordinary odds, because they were his chosen people, carriers to the whole world of his revelation, the true knowledge of who God really is. They were the people from whom his promised Messiah was to come. These years, full of wars and violence, without a prophet from God for over four hundred years between Malachi and John the Baptist, were the dark before the dawn.¹⁴ This book states the theology of martyrdom and the resurrection of the just.⁵

1It 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. This was a decree of the Syrian conqueror, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. During his reign the temple in Jerusalem was plundered to fill his treasury and then turned into a temple to Zeus and pigs were sacrificed on its altars. Ritual prostitution was also conducted in the courts of the Temple of God. The insult to Jewish sensibilities was far more than what would be ordinary to a foreign occupation. Antiochus had profaned the holiest spot in the world!¹

2One of the brothers, speaking for the others, said: "What do you expect to achieve by questioning us? We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors." It was not just the dietary law that was worth dying for. Rather, it was the principle of obedience to the Law that inspired the brothers to die rather than abandon their spiritual heritage. It was for their faith in God that they were persecuted, not just their refusal to eat pork.² He says essentially that they prefer to die rather than sin.

9At the point of death he said: "You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up to live again forever. Here, about a century and a half before Christ, we see the development in the Hebrew scriptures of a hope for an afterlife that was far brighter than Sheol (the underworld, a place of gloom and shadow.) This is one of the earliest biblical texts affirming life after death.² It is for his laws that we are dying."

10After him the third suffered their cruel sport. He put out his tongue at once when told to do so, and bravely held out his hands, He puts out his tongue and hands to have them cut off before he is put to death. Though the tortures strike us as incredibly inhuman, history assures us that such torture was actually administered.⁴

11As he spoke these noble words: "It was from Heaven that I received these; for the sake of his laws I disdain them; from him I hope to receive them again." Here he shows a belief not only in the resurrection where God will raise him up but also that he will rise with a body fully restored.³

12Even the king and his attendants marveled at the young man's courage, because he regarded his sufferings as nothing.

13After he had died, they tortured and maltreated the fourth brother in the same way. One of the functions of this story was to show that even women and children were part of the Jewish resistance.⁵

14When he was near death, he said, "It is my choice to die at the hands of men with the hope God gives of being raised up by him; but for you, there will be no resurrection to life." Not only will the persecutors fail to experience the resurrection to glory, but in verse 17 the understanding is that God will punish these evildoers.³ The teaching of the Church is that the resurrection of all the dead

of both the just and the unjust will precede the Last Judgment. This will be the hour when all who are in the tombs will hear the Son of man's voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. Then Christ will come in his glory and all the angels with him. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left and they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.¹⁶ (CCC 1038)

2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5

The tradition of the church has always been that this letter was written by Paul and was intended to reassure the Thessalonians that the end was not imminent. It is an encouragement to perseverance.⁶

Brothers and sisters:

16May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting encouragement and good hope through his grace,

17encourage your hearts In the Bible, the heart is the seat of the knowledge of God, of profound thought, of spiritual light and of spiritual life. It is also the "heart" that loves.¹⁰ **and strengthen them in every good deed and word.** This prayer concludes the section that deals with the delay in the Second Coming. They were meant to console the people in their time of persecution, and let them know that other events must first take place and that as long as they love and believe in the truth, they need not fear the events that will occur on that day.⁸

1Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, The whole Church, not just the Apostles, is given the task of spreading the message of Jesus. All believers can and should play an active part in this, at least by way of prayer.⁶ **so that the word of the Lord may speed forward and be glorified,** Notice that the prayer is not that they will make progress, but that THE WORD OF THE LORD may make progress.² **as it did among you,**

2and that we may be delivered from perverse and wicked people for not all have faith. These people are probably the ones spreading false rumors about the Day of the Lord. The preaching of the gospel always brings opposition as well as acceptance.⁵ Remember that faith is a supernatural virtue, a gift from God and while it is offered to all, men are free to accept or reject the light he offers them. Not everyone has believed the Apostle's preaching though he has excluded no one from it.⁶

3But the Lord is faithful; John Chrysostom comments: "God is faithful. He has promised salvation, he will save you. But, as he said, he will do so on one condition—that we love him, that we listen to his word and his Law. He will not save us unless we cooperate."⁶ **he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.** The people are reminded that beneath the surface calm of daily living is the struggle that goes on among invisible spiritual powers. Our battle is not against human forces but against the principalities and powers, the evil spirits, the rulers of the world of darkness. These evil rulers, satanic beings and evil princes of darkness are not people, but fallen angels over whom Satan has control. Just remember that the Spirit within us is greater than he that is in the world.⁷

4We are confident of you in the Lord that what we instruct you, you are doing and will continue to do. Paul is confident that the Thessalonians will stay true to Christ and he asks God to give them the endurance they need in the midst of their difficulties.⁶

5May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the endurance of Christ. This is a prayer for an increase in the gift of God's love and in the patient endurance of which Christ is both the example and the donor.³ This last sentence is a beautiful summary of the Christian life—a life ruled by God's love and the constancy of Christ.² We live in a world where there are more nervous break-

downs than at any time in history. It is simply a sign that more and more people have the feeling that they cannot cope with life. We live in a world where men are afraid to look ahead. The outward characteristic of the Christian is that when others break he stands erect, and when others collapse he shoulders his burden and goes on. With the love of God in his heart and the strength of Christ in his life a man can face anything.¹⁵

Luke 20: 27-38

The Sadducees challenge Jesus about his teaching on the afterlife. They are convinced that the Mosaic Law says nothing about a future resurrection and so they present him with a dilemma: if Moses permits a woman to remarry every time her husband dies, will this not bring confusion into the next life? How will she determine who is her legitimate spouse if all of them are raised? Jesus deals with his objectors on their own terms: first, by denying that marriage exists in the next life and second, by deliberately citing the Mosaic Law against them in verse 37.⁹

27Some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, They did not believe in the resurrection of the body nor the immortality of the soul.¹¹ If a tenet of belief could not be demonstrated from the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, it was unacceptable to them.¹ came forward

28and put this question to Jesus, saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us, ‘If someone’s brother dies leaving a wife but no child, his brother must take the wife and raise up descendants for his brother.’ The reason for this was so that the property would not leave the family and that the brother’s name would continue in his posterity.¹²

29Now there were seven brothers;

30the first married a woman but died childless.

31Then the second and third married her, and likewise all the seven died childless.

32Finally the woman also died.

33Now at the resurrection whose wife will that woman be? For all seven had been married to her.”

34Jesus said to them, “The children of this age marry and remarry;

35but those who are deemed worthy This is not something that can be grasped or assumed, but comes from God’s judgment of one’s worthiness; this is an action of God.¹³ to attain to the coming age Luke defines the “coming age” in terms of the resurrection life.¹³ and to the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. The institution of marriage will not exist in heaven. In this world people marry in order to continue their species but after the resurrection there will be no more marriage because people will not die any more.¹¹ However, Jesus didn’t mean that people will not recognize their earthly spouses when they get to heaven. He was trying to tell them heaven is not an extension of life as we know it here on earth.⁷

36They can no longer die, for they are like angels; Like the angels, the saints will be clothed in glory and immortality, but, unlike the angels, they will ultimately live in resurrected bodies and not as disembodied spirits. They are thus equal in some respects, but not the same in all respects.⁹ and they are the children of God because they are the ones who will rise. Belief in the general resurrection is central to the Christian faith. The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed both state that our physical bodies will be raised again to enjoy eternal life.⁹

37That the dead will rise even Moses made known in the passage about the bush, when he called out ‘Lord,’ the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; This is an abbreviated form for God actually said to Moses, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob” which meant that he is the God of men who had historically died (the patriarchs.) If God remains their God in the time of Moses, then in some sense they must still be alive.¹³

38and he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

(1) *The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst*, (2) *“Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:2004”* by Aelred R. Rosser, (3) *“The Jerome Biblical Commentary,”* (4) *“The First And The Second Book Of The Maccabees”* by Martin Schoenberg, O.S.C., (5) *“Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998”* by Lawrence E. Mick, (6) *“The Navarre Bible: Thessalonians And Pastoral Epistles,”* (7) *“The Bread of Life”* by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (8) *“The Collegeville Bible Commentary: 2 Thessalonians”* by Ivan Havener, O.S.B., (9) *“Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke,”* (10) *Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings: Year C”* by Achille Degeest, O.F.M., (11) *“The Navarre Bible: St. Luke,”* (12) *“The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Luke”* by Jerome Kodell, O.S.B., (13) *“The Gospel of Luke”* by Luke Timothy Johnson, (14) *“You Can Understand The Bible”* by Peter Kreeft, (15) *“The Letters To The Philippians, Colossians, And Thessalonians”* by William Barclay and (16) *“Catechism Of The Catholic Church.”*

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.