

The Urban Well

The Mercy Seminar 2026, Term II.2

Jewish Martyrs and the Hope of Resurrection

1 Maccabees 1:1 After Alexander son of Philip, the Macedonian, who came from the land of Kittim, had defeated King Darius of the Persians and the Medes, he succeeded him as king. (He had previously become king of Greece.) ² He fought many battles, conquered strongholds, and slaughtered the kings of the earth. ³ He advanced to the ends of the earth and plundered many nations. When the earth became quiet before him, he was exalted, and his heart was lifted up. ⁴ He gathered a very strong army and ruled over countries, nations, and princes, and they paid him tribute.

⁵ After this he fell sick and perceived that he was dying. ⁶ So he summoned his most honored officers, who had been brought up with him from youth, and divided his kingdom among them while he was still alive. ⁷ And after Alexander had reigned twelve years, he died.

⁸ Then his officers began to rule, each in his own place. ⁹ They all put on crowns after his death, and so did their descendants after them for many years, and they caused many evils on the earth.

¹⁰ From them came forth a sinful root, Antiochus Epiphanes, son of King Antiochus; he had been a hostage in Rome. He began to reign in the one hundred thirty-seventh year of the kingdom of the Greeks.

¹¹ In those days certain renegades came out from Israel and misled many, saying, “Let us go and make a covenant with the nations around us, for since we separated from them many disasters have come upon us.” ¹² This proposal pleased them, ¹³ and some of the people eagerly went to the king, who authorized them to observe the ordinances of the nations. ¹⁴ So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem according to the customs of the nations, ¹⁵ and made foreskins for themselves, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the nations and sold themselves to do evil.

¹⁶ When Antiochus saw that his kingdom was established, he determined to become king of the land of Egypt, in order that he might reign over both kingdoms. ¹⁷ So he invaded Egypt with a strong force, with chariots and elephants and cavalry and with a large fleet. ¹⁸ He engaged King Ptolemy of Egypt in battle, and Ptolemy turned and fled before him, and many were wounded and fell. ¹⁹ They captured the fortified cities in the land of Egypt, and he plundered the land of Egypt.

²⁰ After subduing Egypt, Antiochus turned back in the one hundred forty-third year and went up against Israel and came to Jerusalem with a strong force. ²¹ He arrogantly entered the sanctuary and took the golden altar, the lampstand for the light, and all its utensils. ²² He took also the table for the bread of the Presence, the cups for drink offerings, the bowls, the golden censers, the curtain, the crowns, and the gold decoration on the front of the temple; he stripped it all off. ²³ He took the silver and the gold and the

costly vessels; he took also the hidden treasures that he found. ²⁴ Taking them all, he went into his own land.

He shed much blood

and spoke with great arrogance.

²⁵ Israel mourned deeply in every community;

²⁶ rulers and elders groaned;

young women and young men became faint;

the beauty of the women faded.

²⁷ Every bridegroom took up the lament;

she who sat in the bridal chamber was mourning.

²⁸ Even the land trembled for its inhabitants,

and all the house of Jacob was clothed with shame.

²⁹ Two years later the king sent to the cities of Judah a chief collector of tribute, and he came to Jerusalem with a large force. ³⁰ Deceitfully he spoke peaceable words to them, and they believed him, but he suddenly fell upon the city, dealt it a severe blow, and destroyed many people of Israel. ³¹ He plundered the city, burned it with fire, and tore down its houses and its surrounding walls. ³² They took captive the women and children and seized the livestock. ³³ Then they fortified the city of David with a large strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel. ³⁴ They stationed there a sinful nation, men who were renegades. These strengthened their position; ³⁵ they stored up arms and food, and, collecting the spoils of Jerusalem, they stored them there and became a great menace,

³⁶ for the citadel became an ambush against the sanctuary,
an evil adversary of Israel at all times.

³⁷ On every side of the sanctuary they shed innocent blood;
they even defiled the sanctuary.

³⁸ Because of them the residents of Jerusalem fled;

she became a dwelling of strangers;

she became strange to her offspring,

and her children forsook her.

³⁹ Her sanctuary became desolate like a desert;

her feasts were turned into mourning,

her Sabbaths into a reproach,

her honor into contempt.

⁴⁰ Her dishonor now grew as great as her glory;

her exaltation was turned into mourning.

⁴¹ Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people ⁴² and that all should give up their particular customs. All the nations accepted the command of the king. ⁴³ Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath. ⁴⁴ And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, ⁴⁵ to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane Sabbaths and festivals, ⁴⁶ to defile the sanctuary and the holy ones, ⁴⁷ to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice pigs and other unclean animals, ⁴⁸ and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane ⁴⁹ so that they would

forget the law and change all the ordinances. ⁵⁰ He added, “And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.”

⁵¹ In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. He appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice, town by town. ⁵² Many of the people, everyone who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; ⁵³ they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had.

⁵⁴ Now on the fifteenth day of Chislew, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah ⁵⁵ and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. ⁵⁶ The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. ⁵⁷ Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant or anyone who adhered to the law was condemned to death by decree of the king. ⁵⁸ They kept using violence against Israel, against those who were found month after month in the towns. ⁵⁹ On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering. ⁶⁰ According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised ⁶¹ and their families and those who circumcised them, and they hung the infants from their mothers’ necks.

⁶² But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. ⁶³ They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant, and they did die. ⁶⁴ Very great wrath came upon Israel.

2 Maccabees 6:¹ Not long after this, the king sent an Athenian^[a] senator to compel the Jews to forsake the laws of their ancestors and no longer to live by the laws of God, ² also to pollute the temple in Jerusalem and to call it the temple of Olympian Zeus and to call the one in Gerizim Zeus-the-Friend-of-Strangers, as the people who live in that place are known.

³ Harsh and utterly grievous was the onslaught of evil. ⁴ For the temple was filled with debauchery and reveling by the nations, who dallied with prostitutes and had intercourse with women within the sacred precincts and besides brought in things for sacrifice that were unfit. ⁵ The altar was covered with abominable offerings that were forbidden by the laws. ⁶ People could neither keep the Sabbath nor observe the festivals of their ancestors nor so much as confess themselves to be Jews.

⁷ On the monthly celebration of the king’s birthday, the Jews were taken, under bitter constraint, to partake of the sacrifices, and when a festival of Dionysus was celebrated, they were compelled to wear wreaths of ivy and to walk in the procession in honor of Dionysus. ⁸ At the suggestion of the people of Ptolemais, 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 ⁹ and should kill those who did not choose to change over to Greek customs. One could see, therefore, the misery that had come upon them. ¹⁰ For example, two women were brought in for having circumcised their children. They publicly paraded them around the city with their babies hanging at their breasts and then hurled them down headlong from the wall. ¹¹ Others who had assembled in the caves nearby in order 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.

¹⁸ 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 pig's flesh. ¹⁹ But he, welcoming death with honor rather than life with pollution, went up to the rack of his own accord, ²⁰ spitting it out as all ought to go who have the courage to refuse things that it is not right to taste, even for the natural love of life.

²¹ 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 to pretend that he was eating the flesh of the sacrificial meal that had been commanded by the king, ²² so that by doing this he might be saved from death and be treated kindly on account of his old friendship with them. ²³ But making a high resolve, worthy of his years and the dignity of his old age and the gray hairs that 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.

²⁴ "Such pretense is not worthy of our time of life," he said, "for many of the young might suppose that Eleazar in his ninetieth year had gone over to a foreign way of life, ²⁵ and through my pretense, for the sake of living a brief moment longer, they would be led astray because of me, while I defile and disgrace my old age. ²⁶ Even if for the present I would avoid the punishment of mortals, yet whether I live or die I will not escape the hands of the Almighty. ²⁷ Therefore, by bravely giving up my life now, I will show myself worthy of my old age ²⁸ and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws."

When he had said this, he was dragged at once to the rack. ²⁹ Those who a little before had acted toward him with goodwill now changed to ill will, because the words he had uttered were in their opinion sheer madness. ³⁰ When he was about to die under the blows, he groaned aloud and said: "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."

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.

2 Maccabees 7: It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and straps, to partake of unlawful pig's flesh. ² 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 ancestors." ³ The king fell into a rage and gave orders to have pans and caldrons heated. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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, ⁶ "The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song that bore witness against the people to their faces, when he said, 'And he will have compassion on his servants.'"

⁷ 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?”⁸ He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, “No.” Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done.⁹ 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 a renewal of everlasting life, because we have died for his laws.”

¹⁰ 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 hands¹¹ 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.”¹² 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.

¹³ After he, too, had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way.¹⁴ When he was near death, he said, “One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!”

¹⁵ Next they brought forward the fifth and maltreated him.¹⁶ But he looked at the king and said, “Because you have authority among mortals, though you also are mortal, you do what you please. But do not think that God has forsaken our people.¹⁷ Keep on, and see how his mighty power will torture you and your descendants!”

¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ But do not think that you will go unpunished for having tried to fight against God!”

²⁰ The mother was especially admirable and worthy of honorable memory. Although she saw her seven sons perish within a single day, she bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord.²¹ She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman’s reasoning with a man’s courage and said to them,²² “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.²³ Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, in his mercy gives life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws.”

²⁴ 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 ancestors and that he would take him for his Friend and entrust him with public affairs.²⁵ 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.

²⁶ After much urging on his part, she undertook to persuade her son.²⁷ But, leaning close to him, she spoke in their native language 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.²⁸ I beg 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. And in the same way the human race came into being.²⁹ 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 along with your brothers."

³⁰ 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 ancestors through Moses. ³¹ But you, who have contrived all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, will certainly not escape the hands of God. ³² For we are suffering because of our own sins. ³³ 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. ³⁴ But you, unholy wretch, you most defiled of all mortals, do not be elated in vain and puffed up by uncertain hopes when you raise your hand against the children of heaven. ³⁵ You have not yet escaped the judgment of the almighty, all-seeing God. ³⁶ For our brothers, after enduring a brief suffering for everlasting life, have fallen under God's covenant, but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance. ³⁷ I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our ancestors, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by trials and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, ³⁸ and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation." ³⁹ The king fell into a rage and handled him worse than the others, being exasperated at his scorn. ⁴⁰ So he died in his integrity, putting his whole trust in the Lord.

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

Daniel 12:¹ "At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. ² Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."

Isaiah 25:⁶ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

⁷ And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the covering that is spread over all nations;

⁸ he will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

Isaiah 26:¹⁹ Your dead shall live; their corpses shall rise.

Those who dwell in the dust will awake and shout for joy!
For your dew is a radiant dew,
and the earth will give birth to those long dead.