

# 4 MAKKABEES

## TO THE READER

### EDITION OF THE GREEK TEXT

The NETS rendering of 4 Makkabees follows the Greek text of Alfred Rahlfs' *Septuaginta. Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes, 2 vols.* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935). Of the three manuscripts on which that edition is largely based (Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus), only the latter two include 4 Makkabees. Rahlfs does, however, cite other evidence as well, particularly that of the eighth or ninth century Codex Venetus (V), which, regrettably, lacks 5.11–12.1. A full-scale critical edition has yet to be prepared. Discussion of variant readings can be found in the footnotes to the German translation by Hans-Josef Klauck. Only rarely does the following translation depart from Rahlfs' text; these instances are pointed out in the footnotes.

### THE NETS TRANSLATION OF 4 MAKKABEES

Since 4 Makkabees is an original composition in Greek, there is no need here to indicate the relationship between the Greek text and a Semitic parent text by maintaining a similar relationship between the NETS version and the NRSV. I have therefore departed from the latter translation freely in attempting to capture something of the flavor of the Greek original. That, however, is a task with significant challenges.

Our author writes not only very fluently in Greek but also, in striking contrast with the Jewish conservatism that marks the book's message (the law of Moyses, in all its particularity, is to be faithfully observed in spite of pressures to assimilate to the surrounding Hellenistic environment), in a highly rhetorical and affected Greek style. To be noted is the extensive and often inventive vocabulary employed, a vocabulary that includes a number of rare and poetic terms and a seemingly endless stock of words pertaining to the instruments and inflicting of torture; a particular love of compound words, many apparently of our author's own composition, and a number featuring verbs with a plurality of prefixed prepositions; a bent for finding a variety of ways in which to say the same thing (in the opening verses, for example, the translator is severely taxed to match in English the author's diverse formulations of reason's *supremacy* over the passions); a partiality for extended similes and metaphors; a penchant to apostrophize the characters of his narrative, their virtues, and sundry other abstractions; a predilection for conveying a point by inventing for his characters direct speeches, some explicitly imaginary, others purportedly delivered in the midst of such torments and at such proximity to a ghastly death as to make their deliberate and measured tone astounding; and a tendency in general to appeal to readers' sense of pity and to arouse their horror. Readers disaffected by these characteristics of our text should bear in mind that our author was clearly reflecting the tastes of many of his contemporaries, nor, indeed, have the intervening centuries lacked periods in which the floridity of our author's style was found both pleasing and impressive.

### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Several English translations are available. Older renditions include those of R. B. Townsend in the second volume of Charles; C. W. Emmet (London: SPCK, 1918); and (together with a reproduction of Rahlfs' Greek text) M. Hadas (New York: Dropsie College [Harper], 1953). In addition to the translation in the NRSV, the recent rendering by H. Anderson in the second volume of *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* edited by J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985) should be noted. Nor should the French version of A. Dupont-Sommer (Paris: H. Champion, 1939) and the German version by H.-J. Klauck (Guetersloh: C. Mohn, 1989), both with extensive introductions and notes, be forgotten. Much can be learned from D. A. deSilva's *4 Maccabees* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), with bibliographies of other studies.

STEPHEN WESTERHOLM

1 Since I am about to discuss an eminently philosophical subject—whether pious reason is absolute master of the passions—I would duly advise you to attend diligently to the philosophy here set forth. <sup>2</sup>For the subject is essential to the path to knowledge for everyone and, furthermore, embraces praise of the greatest virtue: I speak, of course, of prudence. <sup>3</sup>If, then, it is apparent that reason prevails over the passions hindering self-control, namely, gluttony and lust, <sup>4</sup>then it is also plainly apparent that it holds sway over the passions impeding justice, such as malice, and over the passions impeding courage, namely, anger, fear and pain. <sup>5</sup>Some might perhaps ask, “How then, if reason overcomes the passions, does it not master forgetfulness and ignorance?” Their attempt at argument is ridiculous. <sup>6</sup>For reason does not overcome its own passions but those opposed to justice, courage and self-control, and it overcomes these not so that it destroys them but so that one does not give way to them.

7 On the basis of many and diverse considerations I could show you that reason is absolute ruler of the passions, <sup>8</sup>but I can demonstrate it much better from the bravery of those who died for the sake of virtue: Eleazaros, the seven brothers and their mother. <sup>9</sup>All of these, in despising sufferings to the point of death, showed that reason has full control over the passions. <sup>10</sup>It is fitting for me to praise for their virtues these men who, together with their mother, died for the sake of nobility of character in this season of the year, but I would also call them blessed for the honors accorded them. <sup>11</sup>Having won, by their courage and endurance, the admiration not merely of all people but even of their abusers, they became the means by which the tyranny exercised against our nation was overthrown. They conquered the tyrant by their endurance so that through them our homeland was purified. <sup>12</sup>But of this it will be possible for me to speak in a moment after I have begun, as I am accustomed to do, by stating my thesis, and then I shall turn to the story about them, giving glory to the all-wise God.

13 We inquire, then, whether reason is the absolute ruler of the passions. <sup>14</sup>We must determine just what reason is and what passion is, how many kinds of passions there are, and whether reason prevails over all of these. <sup>15</sup>Reason, then, is the mind preferring, with sound judgment, the life of wisdom. <sup>16</sup>Wisdom, in turn, is the knowledge of things divine and human and of the causes of these. <sup>17</sup>It amounts, moreover, to training in the law, training by which we learn divine matters reverently and human matters advantageously. <sup>18</sup>Now the kinds of wisdom are prudence, justice, courage and self-control. <sup>19</sup>Supreme over all of these is prudence by which in fact reason prevails over the passions. <sup>20</sup>Of the passions, the two most comprehensive types are pleasure and pain, and each of these pertains by nature both to the body and to the soul. <sup>21</sup>There are many sequences of

passions connected with pleasure and pain. <sup>22</sup>Thus before pleasure comes desire, and after pleasure, delight. <sup>23</sup>Before pain comes fear, and after pain, sorrow. <sup>24</sup>Anger is a passion embracing pleasure and pain, if people reflect on how it affects them. <sup>25</sup>In pleasure there exists as well a malevolent disposition, which, of all the passions, assumes the most varied forms. <sup>26</sup>In terms of the soul, it is expressed in boastfulness, love of money, love of honor, love of strife and envy. <sup>27</sup>With regard to the body, it is expressed in indiscriminate eating, gluttony and private gormandizing.

28 Just as pleasure and pain are two plants growing from the body and the soul, so there are many offshoots of these plants. <sup>29</sup>By weeding, pruning, tying up, watering and in every way irrigating each of these, reason, the master cultivator, tames the jungles of habits and passions. <sup>30</sup>For reason is the guide of the virtues but the absolute ruler of the passions.

Observe now, first of all, that reason is absolute master of the passions <sup>a</sup>by virtue of the restraining powers of self-control<sup>a</sup>. <sup>31</sup>Self-control, then, is dominance over the desires. <sup>32</sup>Of the desires, some pertain to the soul, others to the body, and it is apparent that reason prevails over both of these. <sup>33</sup>Otherwise, how is it that when we are attracted to forbidden foods we turn ourselves away from the pleasures to be had from them? Is it not because reason is able to prevail over the appetites? I for one think so. <sup>34</sup>Therefore when we crave seafood, fowl, quadrupeds and all sorts of foods that are forbidden to us by the law, we abstain because of the dominance of reason. <sup>35</sup>For the passions of the appetites are restrained, checked by the temperate mind, and all the emotions of the body are bridled by reason.

2 And why should it be deemed amazing if the desires of the soul for the enjoyment of beauty are rendered powerless? <sup>2</sup>It is on this account, certainly, that the temperate Ioseph is praised, namely, that by his faculty of thinking he gained control over the urge for gratification. <sup>3</sup>For when he was young and in his prime for intercourse, by his reason he rendered powerless the frenzied desire of his passions. <sup>4</sup>It is apparent that reason prevails not only over the frenzied urge for gratification but also over every desire. <sup>5</sup>For the law says, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or anything that is your neighbor’s.” <sup>6</sup>In fact, since the law has told us not to covet, I could persuade you all the more that reason is able to overcome the desires.

Just so it is with the passions that hinder justice. <sup>7</sup>Otherwise how is it that someone who is habitually a private gormandizer, a glutton, or even a drunkard is trained differently, unless reason is clearly master of the passions? <sup>8</sup>As soon, indeed, as one adopts a way of life in accordance with the law, even though a lover of money, one overpowers one’s own bent, lending without interest to the

<sup>a</sup>Or in the case of acts that hinder self-control

needy and canceling the debt when the seventh year arrives.<sup>9</sup> Even if one is stingy, one is overcome by the law through reason, neither gleaning the harvest nor gathering the last of the vineyards' grapes.

And in all other matters it is possible to recognize this principle, that reason overcomes the passions.<sup>10</sup> For the law overcomes even affection for parents, not betraying virtue on their account.<sup>11</sup> It prevails over love for one's wife, rebuking her for her transgression.<sup>12</sup> It holds sway over love for one's children, punishing them for wickedness.<sup>13</sup> It masters one's relationship with friends, rebuking them for evil.<sup>14</sup> And do not consider it paradoxical when reason, through the law, can prevail even over enmity, not cutting down the cultivated trees of foes but preserving the property of enemies from marauders and helping to raise up what has fallen.

<sup>15</sup> It is apparent that reason overcomes even the more aggressive passions: love of power, vain-glory, boasting, arrogance and envy.<sup>16</sup> For the temperate mind repels all these malicious passions, just as it repels anger—for it masters even this.<sup>17</sup> When Moyses was angry with Dathan and Abiron, he did nothing against them in anger but controlled his anger by reason.<sup>18</sup> For, as I have said, the temperate mind is able to get the better of the passions, to alter some, and to render others powerless.<sup>19</sup> Otherwise why did Iakob, our all wise father, censure the households of Symeon and Leui for slaughtering, contrary to reason, the Shechemites as an entire people, saying, "Cursed be their anger"?<sup>20</sup> For if reason could not overcome anger, he would not have spoken thus.<sup>21</sup> Now when God fashioned human beings, he planted in them their passions and habits,<sup>22</sup> but at the same time he enthroned the mind among the senses as a sacred governor over them all,<sup>23</sup> and to this mind he gave the law. The one who adopts a way of life in accordance with it will rule a kingdom that is temperate, just, good and courageous.

<sup>24</sup> How is it, then, someone may ask, if reason is master of the passions, that it does not overcome forgetfulness and ignorance?

**3** But this argument is entirely ridiculous, for it is apparent that reason prevails not over its own passions but over those of the body.<sup>2</sup> No one of us can eradicate such desire, but reason can provide a way for us not to be enslaved by desire.<sup>3</sup> No one of you can eradicate anger from the soul, but reason can help to deal with anger.<sup>4</sup> No one of us can eradicate malice, but reason can fight at our side so that we are not overcome by malice.<sup>5</sup> For reason is not an uprooter of the passions but their antagonist.

<sup>6</sup> Now this can be explained more clearly by means of the thirst of King Daud.<sup>7</sup> For when Daud had been attacking the allophytes all day long, he, together with the soldiers of our nation, killed many of them.<sup>8</sup> Then when evening fell, he came, sweating and extremely tired, to the royal tent, around which the whole army of our ances-

tors had encamped.<sup>9</sup> Now all the rest were at supper.<sup>10</sup> But the king was as thirsty as could be, and although he had abundant springs at hand, he could not satisfy his thirst from them.<sup>11</sup> But a certain irrational desire for the water in the enemy's territory tormented and inflamed him, undid and consumed him.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, when his armor-bearers complained bitterly over the desire of the king, two staunch young soldiers, respecting the desire of the king, put on their full armor and, taking a pitcher, climbed over the enemy's ramparts.<sup>13</sup> Eluding the guards at the gates, they went searching through the entire enemy camp,<sup>14</sup> found the spring and boldly brought a drink from it to the king.<sup>15</sup> But although Daud was burning with thirst, he reasoned that a drink regarded as tantamount to blood was a dreadful danger to his soul.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, opposing reason to desire, he poured out the drink as an offering to God.<sup>17</sup> For the temperate mind can conquer the compulsions of the passions and quench the flames of frenzied desires.<sup>18</sup> It can overpower bodily agonies even when they are extreme and by the nobility of reason spurn all domination by the passions.

<sup>19</sup> The present occasion now invites us to a narrative demonstration of temperate reason.

<sup>20</sup> At a time when our fathers were enjoying profound peace because of their loyalty to the law and were prospering so that even Seleucus Nicator, king of Asia, had both set aside money for them for the temple service and recognized their polity,<sup>21</sup> then certain persons attempted a revolution against the public harmony and suffered many and various disasters.

**4** For a certain Simon was a political opponent of the noble and good man, Onias, who then held the high priesthood for life. When, though slandering him concerning the nation in every way, he was not able to injure him, he departed as a fugitive, intending to betray our homeland.<sup>2</sup> So he came to Apollonius, governor of Syria, Phoenicia and Cilicia, and said,<sup>3</sup> "Since I am loyal to the interests of the king, I have come to disclose that many tens of thousands of private funds are stored up in the treasuries of Hierosolyma that are not the property of the temple; these belong to King Seleucus."<sup>4</sup> When Apollonius had learned the details of these matters, he praised Simon for his solicitude for the king, went up to Seleucus and informed him of the treasure of funds.<sup>5</sup> Receiving authority to deal with these matters, he proceeded quickly to our homeland with the accursed Simon and a very strong military force.<sup>6</sup> He said that he had come by the king's commands in order to seize the private funds in the treasury.<sup>7</sup> At this announcement the people complained bitterly and protested, considering that it would be outrageous if those who had entrusted deposits to the sacred treasury should be deprived of them. They tried as best they could to prevent him.<sup>8</sup> But with threats Apollonius left for the temple.<sup>9</sup> While the priests, with women and children, were imploring God in the temple to shield the holy place that was

being treated with contempt<sup>10</sup> and while Apollonius was going up with his armed forces to seize the funds, angels on horseback appeared from heaven with lightning flashing from their weapons, instilling in them great fear and trembling.<sup>11</sup> And Apollonius, falling down half-dead in the court of the temple that was open to all races, stretched out his hands toward heaven and with tears began to beg the Hebrews that they would pray for him and propitiate the heavenly army.<sup>12</sup> For he said that he had sinned in such a way that he deserved to die and that, if he were delivered, he would praise the blessedness of the holy place before all people.<sup>13</sup> Moved by these words, the high priest Onias, although otherwise he had scruples about doing so, prayed for him so that King Seleucus would not suppose that Apollonius had been overcome by human treachery and not by divine justice.<sup>14</sup> When Apollonius, beyond all expectations, had been delivered, he went away to inform the king what had happened to him.

15 When King Seleucus died, his son Antiochus Epiphanes, an arrogant and terrible man, succeeded to the office.<sup>16</sup> He deposed Onias from the high priesthood and appointed Onias's brother Jason as high priest,<sup>17</sup> Jason agreeing to pay three thousand six hundred and sixty talents annually if the king would turn the office over to him.<sup>18</sup> So the king turned over to him both the high priesthood and the leadership of the nation.<sup>19</sup> Jason changed the nation's way of life and altered its form of government in complete transgression of the law<sup>20</sup> so that he not only constructed a gymnasium on the very citadel of our homeland but also abolished the temple service.<sup>21</sup> The divine justice, provoked by these acts, caused Antiochus himself to war against them.<sup>22</sup> For while he was waging war against Ptolemy in Egypt, he heard that a rumor had spread about his death and that the Hierosolymites had celebrated with all possible joy. He marched against them speedily,<sup>23</sup> and when he had plundered them, he issued a decree that, if any of them were found living according to the ancestral law, they should die.<sup>24</sup> When, by means of his decrees, he had not been able to subvert the people's loyalty to the law in any way but saw that all his threats and punishments were being disregarded<sup>25</sup> so that even women, because they circumcised their sons, were thrown down headlong together with their infants, though they had known beforehand that they would suffer this;<sup>26</sup> when, then, his decrees were despised by the people, he himself tried through tortures to compel everyone in the nation to renounce Judaism by tasting defiling foods.

**5** The tyrant Antiochus, sitting in state with his counselors on a certain high place and with his armed soldiers standing around him,<sup>2</sup> ordered his bodyguards to drag in each and every Hebrew and to compel them to taste pork and food sacrificed to idols;<sup>3</sup> if any were not willing to eat defil-

ing food, they were to be broken on the wheel and killed.<sup>4</sup> When many persons had been rounded up, one man, a Hebrew<sup>b</sup>, Eleazaros by name, was brought as first of the company before him. He was a priest by birth, a lawyer by profession, advanced in age and known to many in the tyrant's court on account of his age.

5 When Antiochus saw him he said, <sup>6</sup>"Before I begin the tortures against you, old man, I would give you these words of advice, namely, that you save yourself by tasting pork, <sup>7</sup>for I respect your age and your gray hairs. Although you have had your gray hairs for such a long time, you do not seem to me to be a philosopher, since you observe the religion of the Judeans. <sup>8</sup>Why should you abhor eating the very excellent meat of this animal when nature has provided it? <sup>9</sup>For it is senseless not to enjoy delicious things that are not shameful and not right to decline the gifts of nature. <sup>10</sup>But you seem to me to do what is even more senseless if, because you cherish a vain opinion concerning the truth, you continue to despise me at the cost of your own punishment. <sup>11</sup>Will you not awaken from your silly philosophy, dispel the nonsense of your reasonings, and, adopting a mind worthy of your age, pursue a true philosophy of what is beneficial? <sup>12</sup>Will you not have compassion on your old age by bowing to my humane advice? <sup>13</sup>For bear in mind that, if indeed there is some power overseeing this religion of yours, it will excuse you for any transgression committed under duress."

14 When the tyrant urged him in this fashion to eat meat unlawfully, Eleazaros asked to have a word.<sup>15</sup> When he had received permission to speak, he began to address the people as follows:<sup>16</sup> "O Antiochus, we who have been persuaded to adopt a way of life in accordance with divine law do not consider any compulsion more powerful than our ready obedience to the law.<sup>17</sup> Therefore we do not deem it right to transgress the law in any way.<sup>18</sup> Even if, as you suppose, our law were in truth not divine and we wrongly considered it to be divine, not even so would it be possible for us to invalidate our reputation for piety.<sup>19</sup> Therefore do not suppose that it would be a petty sin if we were to eat defiling food.<sup>20</sup> To transgress the law in matters small or great is of equal seriousness,<sup>21</sup> for in either case the law is equally despised.<sup>22</sup> You scoff at our philosophy as though our living by it were not sensible.<sup>23</sup> But it teaches us self-control so that we overcome all pleasures and desires, and it also exercises us in courage so that we endure all pain willingly;<sup>24</sup> it trains us in justice so that <sup>c</sup>in all our dealings we act impartially, and it teaches us piety so that we worship the only living God in a way that befits his greatness.

25 "Therefore we do not eat defiling food, for, believing that the law is divine, we know that the Creator of the world shows us sympathy by imposing a law that is in accordance with nature.<sup>26</sup> He has permitted us to eat what will prove suitable for our souls, but he has forbidden us to eat

<sup>a</sup>I.e. the people <sup>b</sup>Om = Ra <sup>c</sup>Or we hold in balance all our inclinations

the flesh of what will prove contrary to us. <sup>27</sup>It would be tyrannical to compel us not only to transgress the law but also to eat in such a way that you may deride us for this eating of defiling foods that is most hateful to us. <sup>28</sup>But you shall not laugh this laugh at me, <sup>29</sup>nor will I disregard the sacred oaths of my ancestors concerning the keeping of the law, <sup>30</sup>not even if you gouge out my eyes and melt down my entrails. <sup>31</sup>I am not so old or so little of a man that I am not youthful in reason in defense of piety. <sup>32</sup>So then, get your torture wheels ready and fan the fire more vehemently. <sup>33</sup>I do not so pity my old age as to subvert the ancestral law by my own act. <sup>34</sup>I will not play false to you, O law that trained me, nor will I renounce you, beloved self-control. <sup>35</sup>I will not put you to shame, philosophical reason, nor will I deny you, honored priesthood and knowledge of our law code. <sup>36a</sup>O king<sup>a</sup>, you shall not defile the honorable mouth of my old age nor the maturity of a law-observant life. <sup>37</sup>My fathers will receive me as pure, as one who does not fear your tortures even unto death. <sup>38</sup>You will tyrannize the impious, but neither by words nor through deeds will you master my reasonings when piety is at stake."

**6** When Eleazaros in this manner had eloquently countered the exhortations of the tyrant, the bodyguards who were standing by dragged him violently to the instruments of torture. <sup>2</sup>First they stripped the old man, though he remained adorned with the gracefulness that encompasses piety. <sup>3</sup>Thereupon they tied his hands behind him on each side and scourged him with whips, <sup>4</sup>while a herald opposite him cried out, "Obey the king's commands!" <sup>5</sup>But the lofty-minded and noble man, like a true Eleazaros, as though being tortured in a dream, was in no way swayed. <sup>6</sup>Yet while he raised his eyes aloft toward heaven, the old man was being torn in his flesh by whips; he was dripping with blood and lacerated in his sides. <sup>7</sup>Although he fell to the ground because his body could not bear the agonies, he kept his reason upright and unswerving. <sup>8</sup>One of the cruel bodyguards leaped on him and kicked him in the side with his foot so that he would get up again after he fell. <sup>9</sup>But he endured the pains, scorned the torture and persevered through the abuses. <sup>10</sup>Like a noble athlete, the old man, while being beaten, conquered his torturers; <sup>11</sup>in fact, as his face was sweating and he was gasping heavily for breath, he was admired by his torturers themselves for his courageous spirit.

<sup>12</sup> Thereupon, partly because they pitied his old age, <sup>13</sup>partly because they were in sympathy with him from their acquaintance with him and partly because they were in admiration of his perseverance, some of the king's retinue approached him and said, <sup>14</sup>"Eleazar, why are you irrationally destroying yourself through these evil devices? <sup>15</sup>We will set before you some cooked meat; save yourself by pretending to taste pork."

<sup>16</sup> But Eleazaros, as though more bitterly abused by this counsel, cried out: <sup>17</sup>"Never may we, the children of Abraam, think so basely that we play the coward and feign a role unbecoming to us! <sup>18</sup>For it would be irrational if, after we have lived life until old age in accordance with truth, and maintained, by observing the law, the reputation of such a life, we should now change our course <sup>19</sup>and ourselves become a model of impiety for the young so that we should set a precedent for eating defiled food. <sup>20</sup>It would be shameful if we should survive but a little while and during that time be a laughingstock to all for our cowardice; <sup>21</sup>shameful if we were despised by the tyrant as unmanly and did not champion our divine law even unto death. <sup>22</sup>So then, O children of Abraam, die nobly for the sake of piety! <sup>23</sup>And you, bodyguards of the tyrant, why do you delay?"

<sup>24</sup> When they saw that he displayed such loftiness of mind in the face of the tortures and that he remained unmoved by their pity, they brought him to the fire. <sup>25</sup>There they burned him with maliciously contrived instruments, threw him down and poured stinking liquids into his nostrils. <sup>26</sup>When he was now burned to his very bones and about to lose consciousness, he lifted up his eyes to God and said, <sup>27</sup>"You know, O God, that though it is within my power to save myself, I die in fiery tortures for the sake of the law. <sup>28</sup>Be merciful to your people, and be satisfied with our punishment on their behalf. <sup>29</sup>Make my blood their purification, and take my life in exchange for theirs." <sup>30</sup>After he said this, the holy man died nobly in his tortures; he stood firm even in tortures unto death, by virtue of reason, in defense of the law.

<sup>31</sup> By common acknowledgement, then, pious reason is master of the passions. <sup>32</sup>For if the passions had overcome reason, <sup>1b</sup>would have borne testimony for them of their dominance. <sup>33</sup>But now that reason has conquered the passions, we properly ascribe to it the power to govern. <sup>34</sup>It is right for us to acknowledge the strength of reason when it prevails even over external agonies; <sup>c</sup>otherwise it would be absurd. <sup>35</sup>I have shown not only that reason has overcome agonies but also that it overcomes pleasures and in no respect yields to them.

**7** For like a most skillful pilot, the reason of our father Eleazaros steered the ship of piety on the sea of the passions, <sup>2</sup>and though buffeted by the stormings of the tyrant and overwhelmed by the mighty waves of the tortures, <sup>3</sup>in no way did it turn the rudders of piety until it sailed into the haven of immortal victory. <sup>4</sup>No city besieged by many and diverse war machines has ever held out as did that all-holy man. In his sacred soul he was set ablaze by abuses and torments, yet he conquered his besiegers through <sup>d</sup>all-shielding reason that is rooted in<sup>d</sup> piety. <sup>5</sup>For in setting his mind firm like a jutting cliff, our father Eleazar broke the madly raging waves of the passions. <sup>6</sup>O priest, worthy of the priesthood, you neither defiled your sa-

<sup>a</sup>Lacking in Gk <sup>b</sup>we = Ra <sup>c</sup>Gk uncertain <sup>d</sup>Or *reason that shielded his*

cred teeth nor profaned your stomach, which had room only for godliness and purity, by eating defiling foods. <sup>7</sup>O man in harmony with the law, philosopher of divine life! <sup>8</sup>Such should be those whose office is to serve the law, shielding it with their own blood and noble sweat in sufferings even unto death. <sup>9</sup>You, father, confirmed our loyalty to the law through the endurance that brought you glory; the sacred service that you solemnly avowed you did not subvert, and by your deeds you corroborated your words of divine philosophy. <sup>10</sup>O aged man, more powerful than tortures, O elder, fiercer than fire, O supreme king over passions, Eleazar! <sup>11</sup>For just as our father Aaron, armed with the censer, ran through the throng of his people and conquered the fiery angel, <sup>12</sup>so the descendant of Aaron, Eleazar, though being consumed by the fire, remained unswayed in his reason. <sup>13</sup>Indeed, what was most amazing was that, though he was an old man, the sinews of his body already loosed, his muscles relaxed, his nerves exhausted, he became young again <sup>14</sup>in spirit through reason, and by reason like that of Isaak he rendered the many-headed rack ineffective. <sup>15</sup>O man of blessed age, venerable gray hair and law-observant life, whom the faithful seal of death has perfected!

<sup>16</sup> If, therefore, through piety an aged man despised tortures even unto death, by common acknowledgement pious reason is governor of the passions. <sup>17</sup>Perhaps some may say, "Not all have full control of their passions, because not all have prudent reason." <sup>18</sup>But as many as attend to piety with a whole heart, these alone are able to overcome the passions of the flesh, <sup>19</sup>since they believe that they do not die to God, even as our patriarchs Abraam, Isaak and Iakob did not die to God, but live to God. <sup>20</sup>That some appear to be ruled by passion because of the weakness of their reason does not contradict this in any way. <sup>21</sup>What person, who lives as a philosopher by the whole rule of philosophy and trusts in God <sup>22</sup>and knows that it is blessed to endure every pain for the sake of virtue, would not gain full control of the passions with the help of godliness? <sup>23</sup>For only the wise and courageous are masters of their passions.

**8** This is why even the very young, by following a philosophy of reason rooted in piety, have prevailed over even harsher instruments of torture. <sup>2</sup>For when the tyrant was patently defeated in his first attempt, being unable to compel an aged man to eat defiling foods, then in exceedingly violent passion he gave orders to bring others from the captives of the Hebrews, and if they ate defiling food, to set them free when they had eaten, but if they refused, to torture them still more cruelly.

<sup>3</sup> When the tyrant had given these orders, seven brothers—handsome, modest, noble and accomplished in every way—were brought and stood before him along with their aged mother. <sup>4</sup>When the tyrant saw them surrounding their mother in the

middle as though they were a chorus, he was pleased with them. Struck by their fine appearance and nobility, he smiled at them, summoned them nearer and said, <sup>5</sup>"Young men, with friendly feelings I admire each and every one of you. Greatly prizing the handsomeness and the goodly number of you brothers, so many as you are, I not only advise you not to display the same madness as that of the old man who has just been tortured but also encourage you to yield to me and take advantage of my friendship. <sup>6</sup>Just as I am able to punish those who disobey my orders, so I can be a benefactor to those who obey me. <sup>7</sup>Trust me, then, and, if you disown the ancestral law of your polity, you will receive leading positions in the affairs of my state. <sup>8</sup>Enjoy your youth by embracing a Greek way of life and changing your mode of living. <sup>9</sup>For otherwise, if you move me to anger by your disobedience, you will compel me to destroy each and every one of you with terrible punishments through tortures. <sup>10</sup>Therefore have compassion on yourselves, you whom even I, your enemy, pity for your youth and becoming appearance. <sup>11</sup>Will you not consider this, that, if you disobey, nothing awaits you but to die with torments?"

<sup>12</sup> When he had said these things, he gave orders to set the instruments of torture before them so that he might persuade them to eat the defiling food out of fear. <sup>13</sup>But when the bodyguards had placed before them wheels, joint-dislocators, racks, hooks<sup>a</sup>, catapults<sup>b</sup>, cauldrons, frying-pans, thumb-screws, iron claws, wedges and bellows, the tyrant resumed speaking: <sup>14</sup>"Be fearful, young fellows; the justice which you revere will be merciful to you if you transgress the law under duress."

<sup>15</sup> But when they had heard the inducements and saw the terrible devices, not only were they not fearful, but they also countered the tyrant with their own philosophy and by their good sense overthrew his tyranny. <sup>16</sup>Yet let us consider if some among them had been fainthearted and unmanly, what sorts of arguments they might have used. Would they not have been these? <sup>17</sup>"How hapless we are and too, too foolish! When the king invites us and encourages us to accept kind treatment if we obey him, <sup>18</sup>why do we cheer ourselves with vain resolves and venture upon a fatal disobedience? <sup>19</sup>Men and brothers, shall we not fear the instruments of torture, take account of the threats of tortures and flee from this vanity and calamitous conceit? <sup>20</sup>Let us have compassion on our youth and pity the old age of our mother. <sup>21</sup>And let us keep in mind that if we disobey, we shall die. <sup>22</sup>Divine justice will make allowance for us if we fear the king under duress. <sup>23</sup>Why do we remove ourselves from this most pleasant life and deprive ourselves of this delightful world? <sup>24</sup>Let us not test our strength against necessity nor cherish vain opinions at the cost of our own torment on the rack. <sup>25</sup>Not even the law itself would readily condemn us to death for fearing the instruments of torture. <sup>26</sup>How can it be that such contentiousness has

<sup>a</sup>Gk uncertain <sup>b</sup>An instrument of torture

taken hold of us and a fatal obduracy pleases us, when it is within our power to live undisturbed by obeying the king?"

27 But the young men, though about to be tortured, neither said nor considered any of these things, <sup>28</sup>for they were disdainful of the passions and absolute rulers over agonies. <sup>29</sup>As a result, as soon as the tyrant ceased advising them to eat defiling food, they all with one voice together, as though with the same soul, said,

**9** "Why do you delay, O tyrant? We are ready to die rather than transgress our ancestral commandments. <sup>2</sup>For we would cause our forebears to be ashamed with good reason, if we did not show ready obedience to the law and to Moyses our counselor. <sup>3</sup>Counselor and tyrant of transgression, in your hatred for us do not pity us more than we pity ourselves. <sup>4</sup>For we consider harsher than death itself the mercy you offer, which ensures our safety at the price of our transgression of the law. <sup>5</sup>You are trying to intimidate us, threatening us with death by tortures, as though you did not learn from Eleazaros a short time ago. <sup>6</sup>But if the old men of the Hebrews acted piously for the sake of piety even while enduring tortures, still more justly should we young men die, despising the tortures of your imposition, which the old man our teacher conquered. <sup>7</sup>Therefore, tyrant, put us to the test, and if you take our lives because of piety, do not think that, by torturing, you hurt us. <sup>8</sup>For we, through this suffering and endurance, shall gain the prizes accorded virtue and shall be with God, for whose sake we suffer, <sup>9</sup>but you, because of your bloodthirstiness toward us, will endure ample and everlasting torture by fire imposed by divine justice."

10 When they had said these things, the tyrant was not only indignant, as at the disobedient, but also infuriated, as at the ungrateful. <sup>11</sup>Thereupon his armor-bearers, on receiving their orders, brought forward the oldest of them, tore off his tunic and bound his hands and arms with thongs on either side. <sup>12</sup>When they had exhausted themselves by beating him with scourges, yet accomplished nothing, they hoisted him on the wheel. <sup>13</sup>When the noble youth was stretched out around this, his limbs were dislocated. <sup>14</sup>Broken in every limb, he began his denunciation: <sup>15</sup>"Most abominable tyrant, enemy of heavenly justice, savage-minded, you maltreat me in this way not because I have murdered or acted impiously but because I have championed the divine law." <sup>16</sup>And when the bodyguards said, "Agree to eat so that you may be released from the tortures," <sup>17</sup>he said, "Your wheel is not so strong, O abominable henchmen, as to strangle my reason. Maim my limbs, burn my flesh, twist my joints; <sup>18</sup>through all these tortures I will persuade you that children of the Hebrews alone are invincible in virtue's defense." <sup>19</sup>When he said these things, they spread fire under him, and, <sup>a</sup>while fanning the flames<sup>a</sup>, tightened the

wheel further. <sup>20</sup>The wheel was stained on all sides with blood, the heap of coals was being quenched by the drippings of body fluids, and pieces of flesh whirled around the axles of the machine. <sup>21</sup>Although he had already had his skeleton severed, the lofty-minded youth, a true son of Abraam, did not groan, <sup>22</sup>but as though transformed in the fire into immortality, he nobly endured the torments. <sup>23</sup>"Imitate me, brothers," he said. "Do not desert your post in my struggle nor renounce the brotherhood of good courage you share with me. <sup>24</sup>Fight the sacred and noble fight for piety; for its sake the just Providence of our ancestors may become merciful to our nation and take vengeance on the accursed tyrant." <sup>25</sup>When he had said these words, the saintly young man broke off his life.

26 All marveled at his strength of spirit. Then the bodyguards brought the brother second in age to him, and, after equipping themselves with iron hands with sharp claws, they bound him to the torture machine and catapult. <sup>27</sup>They inquired, before he was tortured, whether he was willing to eat, and they heard his noble decision. <sup>28</sup>These leopard-like beasts tore at his sinews with their iron hands, ripped all his flesh off up to his chin and the skin off his head. But he steadfastly endured this agony and said, <sup>29</sup>"How sweet is every form of death for the sake of the piety that we have inherited from our ancestors!" To the tyrant he said, <sup>30</sup>"Do you not think, tyrant most savage of all, that you are being tortured more than I, as you see the arrogant reasoning of your tyranny defeated by our endurance for the sake of piety? <sup>31</sup>I relieve my pain with the joys that come from virtue, <sup>32</sup>but you suffer torture from the threats that hang over impiety. You will not escape, most abominable tyrant, the judgments of divine wrath."

**10** When he too had endured a glorious death, the third was led in and was much urged by many to save himself by tasting the meat. <sup>2</sup>But he cried out, "Do you not know that the same father begot me as well as those who died; the same mother bore me, and I was brought up on the same tenets? <sup>3</sup>I do not renounce the noble ties of brotherhood." <sup>5</sup>But they, taking the man's boldness bitterly, dislocated his hands and feet with their instruments of torture and dismembered him by prying his limbs from their sockets. <sup>6</sup>They broke his fingers, arms, legs and elbows. <sup>7</sup>Since they were not able in any way to suppress him, <sup>b</sup>they tore off his skin<sup>b</sup> and scalped him with their fingertips in the Scythian fashion. <sup>8</sup>Then they immediately brought him to the wheel. On it he was disjoined at his backbone. He saw his own flesh torn all around and drops of blood flowing from his entrails. <sup>9</sup>When he was about to die, he said, <sup>10</sup>"We, most abominable tyrant, are suffering these things because of training and divine virtue. <sup>11</sup>But you, because of your impiety and bloodthirstiness, will endure unceasing tortures."

12 When he, too, had died in a manner worthy

<sup>a</sup>Gk uncertain <sup>b</sup>loosened their instruments of torture = Ra

of his brothers, they dragged in the fourth, saying, <sup>13</sup>"Do not display, you too, the same madness as your brothers, but obey the king and save yourself." <sup>14</sup>But he said to them, "You do not have a fire for me so very hot that I should play the coward. <sup>15</sup>By the blessed death of my brothers, the everlasting destruction of the tyrant and the everlasting life of the pious, I will not disown our noble brotherhood. <sup>16</sup>Contrive tortures, tyrant, so that you may learn from them that I am a brother to those who have just now been tortured." <sup>17</sup>When he heard these words, the bloodthirsty, murderous and utterly abominable Antiochus gave orders to cut off his tongue. <sup>18</sup>But he<sup>a</sup> said, "Even if you remove my organ of speech, God hears the silent as well. <sup>19</sup>See, my tongue hangs loose already. Cut it off, for you will not cut off, beyond this, the tongue of our reason. <sup>20</sup>Gladly, for the sake of God, we let the limbs of our bodies be cut off. <sup>21</sup>God will pursue you swiftly, for you are cutting off a tongue that has been melodious with divine hymns."

**11** When he too died, maltreated by the tortures, the fifth leaped up, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Tyrant, I am not about to beg to be excused from torture for the sake of virtue. <sup>3</sup>I have come of my own accord so that, by killing me too, you may incur punishment from the heavenly justice for more crimes. <sup>4</sup>Hater of virtue, hater of humankind, what have we done that you destroy us in this way? <sup>5</sup>Is it that we show devotion to the Creator of all and live by his virtuous law? <sup>6</sup>But these deeds deserve honors, not tortures." <sup>9</sup>While he was saying such things, the bodyguards bound him and dragged him to the catapult. <sup>10</sup>They tied him to it on his knees, and when they had fitted iron clamps on these, they bent his lower back round the circular wedge. When he was completely curled back round the wheel in the manner of a scorpion, he was dismembered. <sup>11</sup>In this condition, gasping for breath and suffocating in body, <sup>12</sup>he said, "Tyrant, you grant us splendid favors against your will, according to the opportunity to show our enduring loyalty to the law through yet more noble sufferings."

<sup>13</sup> When he too had died, the sixth, a mere boy, was led in. When the tyrant inquired whether he was willing to eat and be released, he said, <sup>14</sup>"In age I am younger than my brothers, but in mind I am their peer. <sup>15</sup>Since we were born and brought up for the same purposes, we ought likewise also to die for the same causes. <sup>16</sup>So if you are resolved to torture me for not eating defiling foods, torture!" <sup>17</sup>When he had said these words, they led him to the wheel. <sup>18</sup>He was stretched tight upon it with great diligence; his back was broken, and he was roasted from beneath. <sup>19</sup>They heated sharp spits in the fire and applied them to his back, pierced his sides and burned his entrails. <sup>20</sup>While he was being tortured, he said, "O contest befitting sanctity in which, for the sake of piety, so many of my brothers have been summoned to a school in

sufferings, a contest in which we have not been defeated! <sup>21</sup>For devout knowledge, O tyrant, is invincible. <sup>22</sup>Armed with nobility of character, I too will die with my brothers, <sup>23</sup>and I too will procure for you a great avenger, you inventor of tortures and foe of the truly pious. <sup>24</sup>We six lads have overthrown your tyranny. <sup>25</sup>For since you can neither sway our reason nor compel us to eat defiling food, is this not your overthrow? <sup>26</sup>Your fire is frigid to us, the catapults painless, your violence unavailing. <sup>27</sup>The bodyguards that govern us are not those of the tyrant but those of the divine law. That is why we hold our reason undefeated."

**12** When he too, thrown into a cauldron, had died in blessedness, the seventh and youngest of all came forward. <sup>2</sup>The tyrant, though he had been vehemently denounced by his brothers, pitied him when he saw the fetters already on him. He summoned him nearer and tried to advise him: <sup>3</sup>"You see the result of your brothers' stupidity; they were tortured on the rack and died for their disobedience. <sup>4</sup>You too, if you do not obey, will die, a tortured wretch, before your time. <sup>5</sup>But if you obey, you will be my friend and will lead in the affairs of my kingdom." <sup>6</sup>When he had exhorted him with these words, he summoned the boy's mother, that he might show mercy to her after she had been deprived of so many sons and that he might urge on the remaining son to a ready obedience that would be his deliverance. <sup>7</sup>But when his mother had spurred him on in the Hebrew language, as we shall relate a little later, <sup>8</sup>he said, "Loose me, and let me speak to the king and to all his Friends who are with him." <sup>9</sup>Extremely pleased by the boy's announcement, they quickly loosed him. <sup>10</sup>Running to the nearest of the frying pans, <sup>11</sup>he said, "Irreverent tyrant, most impious of all the wicked, were you not ashamed, when you have received good things and your kingdom from God, to kill his attendants and torture on the rack those trained in piety? <sup>12</sup>For these deeds, justice will store up for you a fire more fierce and everlasting and tortures, which for all time will not release you. <sup>13</sup>Though you are a man, most bestial one, you were not ashamed to cut out the tongues of those with feelings just like yours, who are made of the same elements, or to maltreat and torture them in this way. <sup>14</sup>Whereas they, by dying nobly, fulfilled their duty of piety toward God, you will grievously lament that you killed without cause those champions of virtue." <sup>15</sup>Thereupon, when he too was about to die, he said, <sup>16</sup>"I will not abandon the valor of my brothers. <sup>17</sup>I call on the God of my ancestors that he may have mercy on our nation. <sup>18</sup>But on you he will take vengeance both in this present life and when you are dead." <sup>19</sup>After he had uttered these imprecations, he flung himself into the frying pans and so gave up<sup>b</sup>.

**13** If, then, the seven brothers disdained sufferings even unto death, it must be acknowl-

<sup>a</sup>i.e. the youth <sup>b</sup>i.e. his life



edged on all sides that pious reason is absolute master of the passions. <sup>2</sup>For if they had been enslaved by the passions and had eaten defiling food, we would have said that they were defeated by them. <sup>3</sup>Now, however, that is not the case, but through reason, which is commendable in God's eyes, they overpowered the passions. <sup>4</sup>It is impossible to overlook the mind's supremacy over the passions, for they<sup>a</sup> prevailed over both passion and pains. <sup>5</sup>How, then, is it possible not to acknowledge the control of passion by good sense shown by those who gave no heed to the agonies caused by fire? <sup>6</sup>For just as towers jutting out over harbors hold back the threats of waves and provide calm to those who sail into the haven, <sup>7</sup>so the seven-towered good sense of the young men, by fortifying the harbor of piety, conquered the unruliness of the passions. <sup>8</sup>For they constituted a holy chorus of piety and encouraged one another, saying, <sup>9</sup>"Brothers, let us die like brothers for the sake of the law; let us imitate the three young men in Assyria who despised the same civic rights accorded us—in a furnace! <sup>10</sup>Let us not be cowardly in our demonstration of piety." <sup>11</sup>While one said, "Courage, brother," another said, "Bear up nobly," <sup>12</sup>and another reminded them, "Remember whence you come and who the father was by whose hand Isaak submitted to be slaughtered for the sake of piety." <sup>13</sup>Each of them and all of them together looked at one another, beaming and exceedingly bold, and said, "With our whole heart let us consecrate ourselves to the God who gave us our souls<sup>b</sup>, and let us use our bodies as a bulwark for the law. <sup>14</sup>Let us not fear him who thinks he is killing us, <sup>15</sup>for great is the contest of the soul and the peril of everlasting torture awaiting those who transgress the commandment of God. <sup>16</sup>Let us arm ourselves, then, with control of passion rooted in divine reason. <sup>17</sup>For if we so die, Abraam, Isaak and Iakob will receive us, and all our fathers praise us." <sup>18</sup>To each of the brothers who were being dragged away, those who remained said, "Do not shame us, brother, nor play false to our brothers who died before us!"

<sup>19</sup> You are not ignorant of the bonds of brotherhood, which the divine and all-wise Providence has allotted through fathers to their descendants, implanting them through their mother's womb. <sup>20</sup>In that womb brothers dwell an equal length of time and are shaped for the same time. They grow from the same blood, and from the same life-spring they are brought to mature birth. <sup>21</sup>Born after an equal time of gestation, they drink milk from the same fountains by whose embraces minds filled with brotherly love are nourished together. <sup>22</sup>They grow more robust through common nurture, daily companionship, other education and our discipline in divine law.

<sup>23</sup> So strong, indeed, is the sympathy of brotherly love. Yet the seven brothers felt still greater sympathy toward each other. <sup>24</sup>For since they were trained in the same law, diligently practiced the same virtues and were brought up together in right living, they loved each other still more. <sup>25</sup>Their

common zeal for nobility of character intensified their goodwill toward one another and their oneness of mind, <sup>26</sup>for with their piety they made brotherly love still dearer to themselves. <sup>27</sup>But although nature, companionship and virtuous habits had combined to augment the bonds of brotherhood in their eyes, through their piety those who were left held firm while they saw their brothers maltreated and tortured even unto death.

**14** Moreover, they even spurred them on to face the abuse so that they not only disdained the agonies but also overcame the passions of brotherly love.

<sup>2</sup> O powers of reason, more royal than kings and freer than the free! <sup>3</sup> O sacred and harmonious unanimity of the seven brothers in defense of piety! <sup>4</sup> None of the seven youths played the coward or shrank back from death, <sup>5</sup> but all hastened to meet death through the tortures as though running on the path to immortality. <sup>6</sup> Just as the hands and feet are moved in harmony at the promptings of the soul, so those holy youths, as though moved by an immortal soul of piety, advanced in harmony to death for the sake of such piety. <sup>7</sup> All-sacred band of seven, band of brothers in harmony! Just as the seven days of creation form a circle round piety, <sup>8</sup> so the youths in chorus formed a circle round the seven-fold band, negating their fear of the tortures. <sup>9</sup> Now, as we hear of those young men's affliction, we shudder. For their part, not only did they see and not only did they hear the word of immediate threat, but they also suffered and endured, and that in pangs of fire. <sup>10</sup> What could be more painful than that? For the power of fire is sharp and intense, and swiftly it destroyed their bodies.

<sup>11</sup> Do not think it remarkable if reason had full control of those men in the midst of the tortures, when even the mind of a woman disdained agonies still more diverse. <sup>12</sup> For the mother of the seven young men endured the torments of each one of her boys.

<sup>13</sup> Consider how complex is the affection of a mother's love for her children, channeling all her feeling into a sympathy rooted deep within. <sup>14</sup> Even unreasoning animals show sympathy and affection for their offspring like that of human beings. <sup>15</sup> For among birds, the tame ones that roam the mountains protect their young on housetops, <sup>16</sup> and others, building their nests on mountain peaks, in clefts of ravines, in holes of trees or on their tops, give birth to their young and fend off the intruder. <sup>17</sup> And if they are unable to fend it off, they help their children to the extent that they are able, flying in circles around them and calling to them with their own voice, grieving all the while out of love. <sup>18</sup> And why is it necessary to offer proof of sympathy for offspring on the part of unreasoning animals <sup>19</sup> when even bees at the time for making honeycombs defend themselves against intruders? They sting, as with an iron dart, those who

<sup>a</sup>i.e. the brothers <sup>b</sup>Or lives

approach their hive, and they defend it to the point of death. <sup>20</sup>Yet sympathy for her children did not move the young men's mother, one in soul as she was with Abraam.

**15** O reason of the children, tyrant over the passions! O piety, dearer to the mother than her children! <sup>2</sup>When two alternatives lay before her—that of piety and that of the temporary preservation of her seven sons on the terms of the tyrant's promise—<sup>3</sup>the mother showed her greater love for piety that, according to divine promise, preserves to everlasting life. <sup>4</sup>How can I characterize the passions involved in the love of parents for their children? We impress upon the tender nature of a child a remarkable likeness both of soul and of form; especially is this true of mothers, because they are more sympathetic in their feelings toward their offspring than fathers. <sup>5</sup>For to the extent that mothers are of tender spirit and bear more children, so much the more attached are they to their children. <sup>6</sup>But more than all other mothers, the mother of the seven boys was attached to her children. Through seven pregnancies she had implanted in herself tender love toward them, <sup>7</sup>and though, because of the many birth pangs she suffered with each of them, she was bound to feel sympathy for them, <sup>8</sup>because of the fear of God she despised the temporary deliverance of her children. <sup>9</sup>Not only so, but because of her sons' nobility of character and their ready obedience to the law, she felt a tender love toward them that was still greater. <sup>10</sup>For they were just, self-controlled, courageous, lofty-spirited, full of brotherly love and of such love for their mother that they obeyed her and kept the ordinances even unto death.

<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, though so many factors related to maternal love drew the mother to sympathy, in the case of none of them were the various tortures strong enough to sway her reason; <sup>12</sup>rather the mother urged each boy individually and all together on to death for the sake of piety. <sup>13</sup>O sacred nature, parental affection, tender love toward offspring, nursing and indomitable maternal passions! <sup>14</sup>Yet, though seeing each one tortured on the rack and burned, the mother, for the sake of piety, did not change her course. <sup>15</sup>She watched the flesh of her children melt about the fire, their toes and fingers quiver on the ground, the flesh of their heads as far down as their chins exposed like masks.

<sup>16</sup> O mother, tried now by pains more bitter than even the birth pangs you suffered for them! <sup>17</sup>O woman, who alone gave birth to such perfect piety! <sup>18</sup>Your firstborn breathing his last did not alter your resolution or your second born looking at you piteously in his tortures or your third expiring. <sup>19</sup>Nor did you weep when you looked at the eyes of each one as they gazed boldly in their tortures at the same abusive treatment or saw in their nostrils the signs of their approaching death. <sup>20</sup>When you saw the burning flesh of children lying upon the flesh of children, severed hands upon hands, scalped heads upon heads, corpses

fallen upon corpses, and when you saw the place full of people on account of the tortures of your children, you did not shed tears. <sup>21</sup>Neither the songs of sirens nor the voices of swans so draw their hearers to fond listening as the voices of children calling to their mother in their tortures. <sup>22</sup>How great and how many were the tortures with which the mother was then tortured as her sons were themselves being tortured on the wheel and with hot irons! <sup>23</sup>But in the midst of these very passions, pious reason endued her heart with manly courage and strengthened her to disregard the immediate claims of parental love.

<sup>24</sup> Although she witnessed the massacre of her seven children and the convoluted diversity of their torments, the noble mother undid the impact of all these things through her divine faith. <sup>25</sup>It was as though, in the council chamber of her mind, the mother saw powerful counselors—nature, birth, parental love, the torments of her children—<sup>26</sup>and held two ballots concerning her children, one bringing death and one deliverance. <sup>27</sup>She gave no heed to the deliverance that would preserve her seven sons for a short time, <sup>28</sup>but, as his daughter, called to mind the perseverance of God-fearing Abraam.

<sup>29</sup> O mother of the nation, vindicator of the law, champion of piety, prizewinner in the contest that took place in your heart, <sup>30</sup>more noble than males in perseverance, more manly than men in endurance! <sup>31</sup>As the ark of Noe stoutly withstood the waves, sustaining the world through the flood that filled the world, <sup>32</sup>so you, O guardian of the law, though overwhelmed on all sides by the flood of your passions and distressed by the strong winds of the tortures of your sons, nobly endured the storms that befell you for your piety.

**16** If, then, a woman, aged and the mother of seven boys, endured seeing the tortures of her children unto death, by common acknowledgement pious reason is absolute ruler of the passions. <sup>2</sup>Thus I have demonstrated that not only men overcame their passions, but also a woman disdained the greatest tortures. <sup>3</sup>The lions surrounding Daniel were not so savage, nor was the furnace of Misael so ablaze with fiercest fire as the nature of her maternal love inflamed her when she saw her seven sons tortured in such diverse ways. <sup>4</sup>But by the reason that is rooted in piety, the mother quenched passions so many and so great.

<sup>5</sup> Consider this also: if the woman, although a mother, had been fainthearted, she would have mourned over them and perhaps spoken as follows: <sup>6</sup>"O how wretched I am, thrice unhappy time and again; though I bore seven boys, I have become a mother of none. <sup>7</sup>In vain, my seven pregnancies, useless, my seven periods of gestation, unfruitful my nursings, wretched the nourishings at my breast. <sup>8</sup>In vain, my boys, did I endure many birth pangs for you and the still more trying anxieties of your upbringing. <sup>9</sup>Alas for my boys, some unmarried, others married to no purpose. I shall not see your children or have the happiness of

being called grandmother. <sup>10</sup>I, a woman with many and fair children, am a widow, alone, with much to lament. <sup>11</sup>Nor when I die will I have any of my sons to bury me."

<sup>12</sup> Yet the holy, God-fearing mother bewailed none of them with this lament and neither attempted to dissuade any of them from dying, nor, as they died, did she grieve. <sup>13</sup>But as though she had a mind of adamant<sup>a</sup> and was giving the full complement of her sons a new birth to life immortal, she rather implored and urged them on to death for the sake of piety. <sup>14</sup>O mother, divine soldier in defense of piety, elder, woman! By perseverance you have conquered even a tyrant and proved stronger in deeds and words than a man. <sup>15</sup>For when you had been arrested together with your sons, you stood and watched Eleazar being tortured and said to your sons in the Hebrew language, <sup>16</sup>"O boys, noble is the contest to which you have been summoned for the testimony you can bear for our nation. Fight zealously in defense of our ancestral law! <sup>17</sup>For it would be shameful if, when this old man endures these agonies for the sake of piety, you young men were to be terrified by the tortures. <sup>18</sup>Remember that it is thanks to God that you have shared in the world and enjoyed life. <sup>19</sup>Therefore you ought to endure all suffering for the sake of God, <sup>20</sup>for whose sake our father Abraam made haste to sacrifice his son Isaak, a father of our nation; nor did Isaak flinch when he saw his father's hand bearing a sword and descending upon him. <sup>21</sup>Daniel the righteous was thrown to the lions. Hananias, Azarias and Misael were hurled into a furnace of fire and, for the sake of God, endured. <sup>22</sup>Since, then, you have the same faith in God, do not be distressed. <sup>23</sup>For it would be unreasonable for those who know piety not to withstand sufferings."

<sup>24</sup> By means of these words the mother of the seven encouraged and persuaded each of her sons to die rather than transgress the commandment of God. <sup>25</sup>And this they knew as well: that those who die for the sake of God, for God now live, as do Abraam, Isaak, Iakob and all the patriarchs.

**17** Some of the bodyguards said that when she was about to be carried off to death, she threw herself into the fire so that no one might touch her body.

<sup>2</sup> O mother, who with your seven boys subverted the strength of the tyrant, frustrated his evil designs and showed the nobility of your faith! <sup>3</sup>Like a roof nobly set upon the pillars of your boys, you endured, unmoved, the earthquake of the tortures. <sup>4</sup>Take courage, then, holy-minded mother, as you keep firm your enduring hope in God. <sup>5</sup>The moon in heaven with the stars is not so awesome as you. After lighting the path to piety for your seven star-like boys, you stand honored before God, firmly set in heaven with them. <sup>6</sup>For your childbearing was from Abraam our father.

<sup>7</sup> If it were possible for us to paint the story of your piety as on some surface<sup>b</sup>, would not onlookers shudder when they saw the mother of the seven children enduring, for the sake of piety, diverse tortures even unto death? <sup>8</sup>Indeed, it would be appropriate to inscribe the following words on their tomb itself as a reminder to the people of our nation<sup>c</sup>:

<sup>9</sup> "Here lie buried an aged priest, an aged woman and seven boys, victims of the violence of a tyrant who wished to destroy the polity of the Hebrews. <sup>10</sup>They vindicated their nation, looking to God and enduring tortures even unto death."

<sup>11</sup> Truly the contest carried on by them was divine, <sup>12</sup>for then virtue, testing them for their perseverance, offered rewards. Victory meant incorruptibility in long-lasting life. <sup>13</sup>Eleazar contended first; the mother of seven boys entered the fray, and the brothers contended. <sup>14</sup>The tyrant was the antagonist; the world and human society looked on. <sup>15</sup>Godliness won the victory and crowned its own athletes. <sup>16</sup>Who did not marvel at the athletes contending for the divine law code? Who were not astonished?

<sup>17</sup> The tyrant himself and all his council marveled at their endurance, <sup>18</sup>for which they now stand before the divine throne and live the life of the blessed age. <sup>19</sup>For Moyses says, "All the sanctified ones are under your hands." <sup>20</sup>And these who have been divinely sanctified are honored not only with this honor, but also in that, thanks to them, our enemies did not prevail over our nation; <sup>21</sup>the tyrant was punished, and the homeland was purified, since they became, as it were, a ransom for the sin of the nation. <sup>22</sup>And through the blood of those pious people and the propitiatory of their death<sup>d</sup>, divine Providence preserved Israel, though before it had been afflicted.

<sup>23</sup> When the tyrant Antiochus saw the courage of their virtue and their endurance under the tortures, he proclaimed to his soldiers that they were an example for their own endurance. <sup>24</sup>He made them<sup>e</sup> noble and courageous for fighting on foot and for siege and pillaged and conquered all his foes.

**18** O Israelite children, offspring of the seed of Abraam, obey this law, and act piously in every way, <sup>2</sup>knowing that pious reason is master of the passions and of pains, not only of those from within but also of those from without.

<sup>3</sup> Wherefore those who, for the sake of piety, gave over their bodies to sufferings were not only admired by human beings but also deemed worthy of a divine inheritance. <sup>4</sup>Thanks to them the nation gained peace; by reviving loyalty to the law in the homeland, they pillaged their enemies. <sup>5</sup>The tyrant Antiochus was punished on earth, and now that he has died, he continues to undergo chastisement. For when he was in no way whatever able to compel the Hierosolymites to become allophyles

<sup>a</sup>I.e. steel <sup>b</sup>Lacking in Gk <sup>c</sup>Or memorial to these heroes of our nation <sup>d</sup>I.e. atonement wrought by their death  
<sup>e</sup>I.e. his soldiers

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and change their way of life from their ancestral customs, he left Hierosolyma and marched against the Persians.

6 The mother of the seven boys spoke these righteous sayings to her children: <sup>7</sup>"I was a pure virgin and did not step outside my father's house, but I kept watch over <sup>a</sup>the built rib<sup>a</sup>. <sup>8</sup>No seducer or corrupter on a desert plain corrupted me, nor did the seducer, the snake of deceit, defile the purity of my virginity. <sup>9</sup>At the time of my maturity I remained with my husband; when these sons came of age, their father died. Blessed was he, for he lived a life marked by the blessing of children and did not suffer the grief of the time of childlessness. <sup>10</sup>While he was still with you, he taught you the law and the prophets. <sup>11</sup>He read to you of Habel, who was murdered by Kain, of Isaak, who was offered as a whole burnt offering, of Ioseph in prison. <sup>12</sup>He told you of the zealot Phinees; he taught you about Hananias, Azarias and Misael in the fire. <sup>13</sup>He praised Daniel in the den of the lions and blessed him. <sup>14</sup>He reminded you of the scripture of Esaia, which says, 'Even if you should go

through fire, the flame shall not consume you.' <sup>15</sup>He sang for you with words of the psalmist Daud when he says, 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous.' <sup>16</sup>For you he cited the proverb of Salomon when he says, 'He is a tree of life to those who do his will.' <sup>17</sup>He affirmed the words of Iezekiel when he says, 'Shall these dry bones live?' <sup>18</sup>For he did not forget to teach the song that Moyses taught which says, <sup>19</sup>'I will kill, and I will make alive; this is your life and the length of your days.' "

20 O bitter was that day—and yet not bitter—when the bitter tyrant of the Greeks quenched fire with fire in his cruel cauldron and with seething rage brought the seven boys of the daughter of Abraam to the catapult and again to his tortures, <sup>21</sup>pierced the pupils of their eyes, cut off their tongues and killed them with various tortures. <sup>22</sup>For these deeds divine justice has pursued and will pursue the accursed tyrant. <sup>23</sup>But the children of Abraam with their prizewinning mother are gathered together into the chorus of the fathers and have received pure and immortal souls from God, <sup>24</sup>to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>a</sup>i.e. woman

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