

2 MACCABEES – SHORT VERSION

The Second Book of Maccabees is *not* a continuation of the First Book. Rather, it is in part parallel to it. Leslie Hoppe, O.F.M., writes: *Second Maccabees is an independent witness of some of the same events covered in 1Mc. There is, however, a significant difference in the response that the two books give to the policy of forced Hellenization begun by Antiochus IV and 1Mc supports armed resistance to Antiochus and his policies. It tells the story of the one family of priests, the Maccabees, who successfully led an armed revolution against the Seleucid Empires, leading to the establishment of Jewish independence.*

2Mc, on the other hand, sees Judah's future as in the hands of its God. The author places less emphasis on the military exploits of the Maccabees and their followers while focusing more attention on the witness of people like Eleazar, who embraced martyrdom when forced to choose between violating the Torah and accepting death.

Of theological importance are the author's teachings on the resurrection of the just on the last day (7:9, 11, 14, 23; 14:46), the intercession of the saints in heaven for people living on earth (15:11-16), and the power of the living to offer prayers and sacrifices for the dead (12:39-46).

Key themes: Heroism in the face of persecution, trust in God, the glory of martyrdom, heavenly reward of the just.

Division of chapters

As with books of the Bible, scholars divide the chapters of this book in different ways. The following is one way.

Part 1: Letters to Jews in Egypt (author's preface, Chapters 1-2)

Part 2: Wonders in the Temple—the case of Heliodorus (Chapter 3)

Part 3: Judas Maccabeus leads the holy war (Chapters 3-9)

Part 4: Later campaigns of Judas Maccabeus (Chapter 10:9-15)

Suggested texts to read

7:9, 11, 14 & 23 & 14:26 are some of the first references to belief in an afterlife in the Old Testament.

7:1-42. An inspiring story of a mother and her sons willing to die rather than deny her faith.

12:42-46, especially verse 44. These verses are often used to support Catholic belief in praying for the souls in purgatory.