

W 1. Journal Study Questions

Instructions: Choose one of the following texts to read and answer the questions asked. Each offers insight into the world of the 2nd Temple period, though none is considered part of the canon (the Catholic Bible identifies these as deuterocanonical = 2nd canon or additional canonical writings). Their value is that we see real people of faith trying to make sense of their struggles, just like we do when confronting crises that rock our very foundations. Notice that the setting of the exile is still fresh in the mind of the writer, much like 9/11 is still fresh in the minds of those who experience it.

Option 1: Our writer is a 2nd Temple Jew living under Greek rule. He offers a spiritual explanation and imaginative prayer that is aimed at encouraging the hearer-readers who would read this work. The name Azariah (which means “the LORD has helped”) was changed by the Babylonians to Abednego (“Servant of Nego/Nebo,” a major God in Babylon who oversaw writing and vegetation.) The prayer is important for what it reveals about the beliefs of some Jews regarding God, sin, and deliverance.

The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men (Apocrypha)

INTRODUCTION

1:1 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walked around in the flames, singing hymns to God, blessing the Lord.

² While standing and praying in the middle of the fire, Azariah spoke like this:

COMMUNAL LAMENT, CONFESSION, AND PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE (3-22)

Address to God (3-4)

³ Blessed are you, Lord God of our ancestors. You deserve to be praised and honored forever!

⁴ Everything you've done to us is fair (just).

All your actions are right, your ways consistent; all your decisions are sound (true).

Confession of Sins (5-9)

⁵ You judged us fairly in all the things you've done to us and to Jerusalem, our ancestors' holy city. You were honest and fair in doing all these things to us because of our sins.

⁶ We sinned and broke the law by turning from you; we sinned in everything we did.

⁷ We didn't obey your commands; we didn't keep them or do as you ordered us, although the orders were for our own good.

⁸ All that you've brought upon us, all that you've done to us, has been fair.

⁹ You handed us over to our enemies, immoral rebels who hate God's laws, and to an unjust king, the most evil one in the whole world.

Petition (10-17): Contrasts Israel's Shame in Exile with God's Glorious Name

- Appeal to God's Promise to Abraham to make Israel a great nation through Isaac
- Reflection on Israel's current circumstances (no temple, no sacrifices)
- Prayer to accept a contrite heart and humble spirit as an equivalent of sacrifice

¹⁰ Now there's nothing that we can say. Shame and blame cover your servants and those who worship you.

¹¹ For the sake of your own reputation, please don't hand us over permanently! Don't set aside your covenant!

¹² Don't turn your mercy away from us! Hold to it for the sake of Abraham, whom you loved, and Isaac, your servant, and Israel, your holy one.

¹³ You told them you would give them descendants, as many as the stars of the sky and the grains of sand beside the sea.

¹⁴ Look, Lord, we have become smaller than any other nation. We are disgraced now in front of everybody because of our sins.

¹⁵ In this time we have no ruler or prophet or leader, no entirely burned offering or sacrifice, no special gift or incense, no place to bring gifts to you and find mercy.

¹⁶ Accept us, please, with our crushed souls and humble spirits, as if we brought entirely burned offerings of rams and bulls as if we brought tens of thousands of fat lambs.

¹⁷ May this be the kind of offering we make in your presence today, and may we follow you completely,¹ since no shame will come to those who come to terms with you.

Petition (18-22): Prayer for Deliverance

- Emphasizes God's abundant mercy and marvelous works
- Contrasts Israel's (and God's) shame if God does not intervene and the glory God will accrue if He does act
- Concludes with recognition of God and He alone is the Lord God over the world

¹⁸ Now we follow you with our hearts, honor you, and seek your presence.

¹⁹ Don't put us to shame! Instead, deal with us in line with your kindness and great mercy.

²⁰ As you have worked wonders before, so rescue us now! Build up your reputation, Lord!

²¹ Let all who mistreat your servants be humiliated. Let them be put to shame and lose all their authority; may their strength be smashed.

²² Let them know that you alone are the Lord God, more honored than anyone else in the world.

THE SONG OF THE THREE JEWS (23-68)

Narrator ²³ Now the king's aides, who had thrown them into the furnace, were constantly feeding the fire with petroleum, tar, kindling, and dry sticks.

²⁴ Flame shot out of the furnace to a height of more than 70 feet,

²⁵ spreading out and burning the Babylonians who stood near the furnace.

²⁶ But the Lord's angel came down among Azariah and his friends and waved the fiery flames out of the furnace.

²⁷ He made the middle of the furnace seem like a cool breeze was blowing through it.

The fire didn't touch them at all; it didn't hurt or upset them.

²⁸ Then with one voice the three began singing hymns, praising and blessing God right there in the furnace. They said:

3 Jews ²⁹ Blessed are you, Lord God of our ancestors. You are worthy of praise and raised high above all others forever. Blessed is your glorious and holy reputation, worthy of praise and raised high above all others forever.

³⁰ Blessed are you in your glorious, holy temple, worthy of hymns and honored above all others forever.

³¹ Blessed are you, sitting on the winged creatures, looking down into the farthest depths, worthy of praise and raised high above all others forever.

³² Blessed are you on your royal throne, worthy of hymns and raised high above all others forever.

³³ Blessed are you in the dome of the sky, worthy of hymns and honored forever.

³⁴ All works of the Lord, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

³⁵ Heavens, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

³⁶ Angels serving the Lord, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

³⁷ All you waters above the sky, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

³⁸ All you heavenly powers, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

³⁹ Sun and moon, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁰ Stars of the sky, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴¹ Rainstorms and dew, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴² All you winds, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴³ Fire and burning, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁴ Cold and heat, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁵ Dewdrops and falling snow, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁶ Nights and days, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁷ Light and darkness, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁸ Ice and winter, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁹ Frost and snow, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁰ Lightning and clouds, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵¹ Let the earth bless the Lord. Let it sing hymns and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵² Mountains and hills, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵³ All you things that grow in the earth, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁴ Oceans and rivers, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁵ Running waters, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁶ Sea monsters and all you things that swarm in the water, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁷ All birds of the sky, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁸ Wild and tame animals, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁹ You human beings, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁶⁰ Israel, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁶¹ Priests, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁶² You who serve the Lord, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁶³ Spirits and souls of good people, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁶⁴ You people who are holy and have humble hearts, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁶⁵ Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever, because he rescued us from the grave, and saved us from death. God pulled us out of the middle of the scorching furnace and pulled us out of the middle of the fire.

⁶⁶ Tell people that the Lord is good because his mercy lasts forever.

⁶⁷ All you who worship the Lord, the God of gods, bless him, sing hymns, and tell people that God's mercy lasts forever!

Questions:

1. What ideas from this document reflected some of the beliefs about God that you have?
2. What ideas from this document reflected some of the beliefs you hold about sin and its consequences?
3. Do you think this document would have been encouraging to people who lived under the rule of the Greeks? Why?
4. Do you think these sentiments would be encouraging to people today as they struggle with the uncertainties of our day?

Option 2: The writer of this delightful little story expresses Jewish attitudes toward God and the gods of the nations. It is considered the first detective story ever written and reminds me of the popular stories of Sherlock Holmes. Once again, the setting recalls the trauma of exile but puts a positive spin on God's care for the Jews during this time. The story involves Daniel and his keen wisdom over the gods of Babylon and their priestly representatives.

Bel and the Dragon (Apocrypha)

Daniel and the Priests of Bel

Narrator When King Astyages was laid to rest with his ancestors, Cyrus the Persian succeeded to his kingdom.

² Daniel was a companion of the king and was the most honored of all his friends.

³ Now the Babylonians had an idol called Bel,

and every day they provided for it 12 bushels of choice flour and 40 sheep and 6 measures of wine.

⁴ The king revered it and went every day to worship it.
But Daniel worshiped his own God.
So, the king said to him,

King Cyrus "Why do you not worship Bel?"

Daniel ⁵ He answered,
"Because I do not revere idols made with hands, but the living God,
who created heaven and earth and has dominion over all living creatures."

Narrator ⁶ The king said to him,

King Cyrus "Do you not think that Bel is a living god?
Do you not see how much he eats and drinks every day?"

Narrator ⁷ And Daniel laughed, and said,

Daniel "Do not be deceived, O king, for this thing is only clay inside and bronze outside,
and it never ate or drank anything."

Narrator ⁸ Then the king was angry and called the priests of Bel and said to them,

King Cyrus "If you do not tell me who is eating these provisions, you shall die.
⁹ But if you prove that Bel is eating them, Daniel shall die,
because he has spoken blasphemy against Bel."

Daniel Daniel said to the king,
"Let it be done as you have said."

Narrator ¹⁰ Now there were 70 priests of Bel, besides their wives and children.
So the king went with Daniel into the temple of Bel.
¹¹ The priests of Bel said,

Priests "See, we are now going outside.
You yourself, O king, set out the food and prepare the wine,
and shut the door and seal it with your signet.
¹² When you return in the morning, if you do not find that Bel has eaten it all, we will die; otherwise,
Daniel will, who is telling lies about us."

Narrator ¹³ They were unconcerned, for beneath the table they had made a hidden entrance, through which
they used to go in regularly and consume the provisions.
¹⁴ After they had gone out, the king set out the food for Bel.
Then Daniel ordered his servants to bring ashes,
and they scattered them throughout the whole temple in the presence of the king alone.
Then they went out, shut the door, sealed it with the king's signet, and departed.
¹⁵ During the night the priests came as usual, with their wives and children,
and they ate and drank everything.
¹⁶ Early in the morning the king rose and came, and Daniel with him.
¹⁷ The king said,

King Cyrus "Are the seals unbroken, Daniel?"

Narrator He answered,

Daniel "They are unbroken, O king."

Narrator ¹⁸ As soon as the doors were opened, the king looked at the table,

King Cyrus and shouted in a loud voice,
"You are great, O Bel, and in you, there is no deceit at all!"

Narrator ¹⁹ But Daniel laughed and restrained the king from going in.

Daniel "Look at the floor," he said,
"and notice whose footprints these are."

Narrator ²⁰ The king said,

King Cyrus "I see the footprints of men and women and children."

Narrator ²¹ Then the king was enraged, and he arrested the priests and their wives and children.
They showed him the secret doors through which they used to enter to consume what was on the table.
²² Therefore the king put them to death,
and gave Bel over to Daniel,
who destroyed it and its temple.

Daniel Kills the Dragon

²³ Now in that place there was a great dragon, which the Babylonians revered.
²⁴ The king said to Daniel,

King Cyrus "You cannot deny that this is a living god; so, worship him."

Daniel ²⁵ Daniel said,
"I worship the Lord, my God, for he is the living God.
²⁶ But give me permission, O king, and I will kill the dragon without sword or club."

King Cyrus The king said,
"I give you permission."

Narrator ²⁷ Then Daniel took pitch, fat, and hair, and boiled them together and made cakes,
which he fed to the dragon.
The dragon ate them and burst open.
Then Daniel said,

Daniel "See what you have been worshiping!"

Narrator ²⁸ When the Babylonians heard about it, they were very indignant
and conspired against the king, saying,

People "The king has become a Jew.
He has destroyed Bel,
and killed the dragon,
and slaughtered the priests."

Narrator ²⁹ Going to the king, they said,

People "Hand Daniel over to us, or else we will kill you and your household."

Narrator ³⁰ The king saw that they were pressing him hard,
and under compulsion, he handed Daniel over to them.

Daniel and the Lion's Den

³¹ They threw Daniel into the lions' den, and he was there for 6 days.
³² There were 7 lions in the den,

and every day they had been given 2 human bodies and 2 sheep.
But now they were given nothing so that they would devour Daniel.

³³ Now the prophet Habakkuk was in Judea.

He had made a stew and had broken bread into a bowl,
and was going into the field to take it to the reapers.

³⁴ But the angel of the Lord said to Habakkuk,

Angel "Take the food that you have to Babylon, to Daniel, in the lions' den."

Habakkuk ³⁵ Habakkuk said,
"Sir, I have never seen Babylon, and I know nothing about the den."

Narrator ³⁶ Then the angel of the Lord took him by the crown of his head
and carried him by his hair.
With the speed of the wind, he set him down in Babylon, right over the den.
³⁷ Then Habakkuk shouted,

Habakkuk "Daniel, Daniel! Take the food that God has sent you."

Daniel ³⁸ Daniel said,
"You have remembered me, O God, and have not forsaken those who love you."

Narrator ³⁹ So Daniel got up and ate.
And the angel of God immediately returned Habakkuk to his own place.
⁴⁰ On the 7th day the king came to mourn Daniel.
When he came to the den he looked in, and there sat Daniel!
⁴¹ The king shouted with a loud voice,

King Cyrus "You are great, O Lord, the God of Daniel, and there is no other besides you!"

Narrator ⁴² Then he pulled Daniel out,
and threw into the den those who had attempted his destruction,
and they were instantly eaten before his eyes.

Questions:

1. What surprised or delighted you most about these little stories? Did you have any concerns about what you read or how the author expressed himself?

In the Bel story, I was surprised at how open King Cyrus was to have his god challenged by Daniel. To put him to the test to see if he was "real" or not. It makes me wonder how serious the Persians took their religion. He seemed to be fascinated with Daniel's belief in his being just made of clay. I also thought putting ashes on the floor was very clever of Daniel. Daniel was also very brave since it is pretty clear that Cyrus was brutal in his judgments which we know something about with the stories in the Old Testament. He took a lot of risks to reveal the lie behind the false god but the Bel story does not really provide support for the one true God except to show that Bel was a false god who could not eat and the priest were deceiving the king and the people.

For the dragon story, first, I want to see the dragon...just saying. I was also surprised that Cyrus would allow Daniel to try to kill him/her even though the dragon was revered by the people. He took a risk that this would turn out badly for the dragon and irritate his people and it did. I am also curious as to how Daniel thought that combination of ingredients would cause the dragon's death or that he/she would even eat it. I know I am probably reading too much into the story but that is how my mind works.

For the lion's den, why did God instruct Habakkuk to feed Daniel when it was the lions who were hungry? This makes no sense to me.

2. What beliefs about God and the nations' gods do you think would have been encouraging to Jews living under the rule of the Gentiles? Why?

The Jews would know that their God was a true god and those of the Gentiles were just man made and therefore no match for their God. Also, the true identity of the false gods was easily revealed with a little thought. The only "tricky" part is that the people did not like having the truth revealed, I think, so this carried serious risks. But God has shown Himself faithful to protect Daniel so that would have brought them some peace, I think.

3. What can we learn about this time from the themes or ideas presented in these little stories?

Cyrus was a brutal ruler though curious and open to challenging the beliefs of his people. It seems that God gave Daniel much favor in this foreign land to reveal truth to the Gentiles and their king but the process carried great personal risk since the people resented the truth being revealed and could sway the king to take action against Daniel.

Their religion appears to be very manipulative and deceitful. Human life was "cheap"...two humans and two sheep given daily to the 7 lions for food...the priests and their families killed for the priests' deceit.

4. Do you think any of these sentiments would be encouraging to people today as they struggle with the uncertainties of our day?

It has been my experience when talking to people that many want to believe what they want to believe and are not very open to discussing whether their beliefs are grounded in truth or fiction. How can you help someone who is struggling with their issues if you cannot help them see what is true and what is false? It seems the people of Cyrus's day were more open to believing what they saw with their own eyes (even if they didn't like it). There is such a deceiving spirit out in our world today. If you try to pursue the discussion, you just drive people further away.

W 2. Journal Study Questions

Instructions: The following text was written during the nearly 100 years of Jewish independence from Gentile rule, and while it is not a part of the Protestant bibles, it does occur in the Catholic Apocrypha. There is a simple explanation for these differences: (1) Protestants adopted the Hebrew canon of the Scriptures whereas (2) Catholics adopted the Greek canon that resulted from the translation of the Old Testament into Greek (the Septuagint). The LXX (= Septuagint) included several popular writings from the period when the Greek translations were made. You could say that these additional writings were considered inspiring for Diaspora communities struggling to remain faithful while surrounded by pagans. They are considered helpful, but not necessarily canonical.

Our 2nd Temple Document Reading: The writer of 2 Maccabees is a 2nd Temple Jew living under the Hasmonean rule. He is reflecting on how the Jews gained their freedom during a time of cruelty and oppression by Antiochus Epiphanes. In some ways, the author is trying to justify the Hasmoneans as God's faithful servants, though some Jewish groups would have argued they were corrupt. What all Jews could agree with is the faithfulness of those who were willing to risk death to remain loyal to YHWH. This is a story of martyrs that took place during the first religious war in history, the Maccabean Revolt.

2 Maccabees

Letter to the Jewish Diaspora Community in Egypt

1:1 To our Jewish brothers and sisters in Egypt. Greetings! Your Jewish brothers and sisters in Jerusalem and in the country of Judea wish you prosperous peace.

² May God do good for you and remember the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, his faithful servants.

³ May God give to all of you the passion to worship him and to do his will with a whole heart and a willing spirit.

⁴ May God open your heart to his Law and commands and give you peace.

⁵ May God listen to your prayers and be reconciled with you and not abandon you in an evil time.

⁶ We are praying for you here.

⁷ In the year 169 (143 B.C.), during the rule of Demetrius, we Jews wrote to you during a critical period of suffering that happened to us in the years after Jason and his followers revolted from the holy land and the kingdom.

⁸ They burned down the gate and murdered innocent people. We pleaded to the Lord, and the Lord heard us. We offered sacrifices and fine flour, lit the lamps, and set out the sacred loaves.

⁹ So now you should keep the Festival of Booths in the month of Kislev,

¹⁰ in the year 188 (November-December, 124 B.C.).

The citizens of Jerusalem and Judea, the council of elders, and Judas send greetings and wishes of good health to Aristobulus, teacher of King Ptolemy (Greek ruler over Egypt) and a member of the family of the anointed priests, and to the Jews in Egypt... (*I am omitting some of the material not relevant to our task*).

2:19 This scroll is about the stories of Judas the Maccabee and his brothers, the purification of the great temple, and the restoration of the altar.

²⁰ It will tell of the wars against Antiochus Epiphanes and his son Eupator,

²¹ and the appearances from heaven to those who had gloriously performed brave deeds for Judaism.

Though they were few in number, they took back the whole country, chased off the barbaric hordes,

²² regained the temple renowned throughout the whole inhabited world, freed the city, and restored the laws that were almost abolished-- because the Lord with all kindness was merciful to them.

²³ Jason of Cyrene recorded all of these things in five scrolls, which we will attempt to condense into one. . . (***The Temple is plundered, and Antiochus uses the money to fund his war with Egypt***).

²¹ Antiochus carried away 102,600 pounds of silver from the temple and hurried back to Antioch, imagining in his pride and arrogance. . .

²² He left governors who mistreated the people. In Jerusalem, there was Philip of the Phrygians, who had a manner more barbarous than that of the man who appointed him.

²³ In Mount Gerizim there was Andronicus, and in addition, there was Menelaus, who treated the citizens worse than the others. In his hostility against the Jewish citizens,

²⁴ Antiochus sent Apollonius, a Mysian leader of 22,000 soldiers, with the command to slaughter all adult men but to sell the women and children into slavery.

²⁵ When Apollonius arrived in Jerusalem, he pretended to be peaceable. He waited until the holy Sabbath day to take advantage of the Jewish rest from work, and then he led an armed parade of his troops.

²⁶ He suddenly killed with swords all those who had come out to see the spectacle.

While running into the city with his foot soldiers, he slaughtered a large number of the crowd.

²⁷ But Judas, also known as the Maccabee, and about 10 men with him, fled into the highlands where he (along with those accompanying him) managed to avoid defiling themselves by living like wild animals: they ate grass for food.

The author relates various tales and exploits of battles

Suppression of Judaism

Narrator/author **6:1** Shortly afterward the king sent out an Athenian elder¹ to force the Jews to turn away from their ancestral laws and stop living according to God's laws.

² He was also ordered to defile the temple in Jerusalem and to rename it for Zeus Olympus, and to rename the temple in Mount Gerizim for Zeus, Friend of Strangers, just as the people living there requested.

³ The onslaught of this evil was severe and hard for all to bear.

⁴ The Gentiles filled the temple with wild partying and sexual indulgence.

They were entertaining themselves with prostitutes and having sex with women in the priestly chambers. In addition, they carried in unfit things,

⁵ and the altar was illegally covered with offerings forbidden by the laws.

⁶ It was impossible to keep the Sabbath or the ancestral festivals, or even simply to profess to be a Jew.

⁷ Instead, out of bitter necessity, they had to observe the birthday of the king each month by eating the organs of sacrificial animals. When the Festival of Dionysus (Greek god of wine) arrived, they were forced to take part in a procession honoring Dionysus, holding ivy wreaths.

⁸ At Ptolemais' suggestion, a decision was announced to the neighboring Greek cities that they should adopt the same policy against the Jews and that they should be made to eat the sacrificial portions,

⁹ and that those who refused to change to Greek practices should be slaughtered.

At that point, it was easy to see the miserable state that had arrived.

¹⁰ For instance, they brought forward 2 women who had circumcised their sons, with their infants hanging from their breasts. They dragged them around the city publicly, then hurled them down from the city wall.

¹¹ Others gathered secretly into caverns nearby to keep the seventh day, but they were betrayed to Philip. They were all burned together because they were reluctant to defend themselves, out of respect for the most sacred day.

Divine Significance of the Persecution

¹² So I urge those stumbling upon this scroll not to shrink back because of these misfortunes but to understand that these punishments weren't for the destruction of our people but for their discipline.

¹³ It is a sign of great kindness that those Jews who acted immorally weren't left alone for very long but experienced punishments immediately.

¹⁴ With other nations the Lord patiently delays punishment until they fill up the full measure of their sins, but with us he decided to deal differently, and is exacting retribution on us before

¹⁵ our sins reach their peak.

¹⁶ Therefore, he never withdraws his mercy from us. Although disciplining us with misfortunes, God doesn't forsake his own people.

¹⁷ Only let this be said to us as a reminder. After this brief digression, it is necessary to go on with the narrative.

Martyrdom of the Elderly Scribe Eleazar

Narrator

¹⁸ A certain Eleazar, one of the leading scribes, elderly in age and with a most dignified outward appearance, was being compelled to open his mouth and eat pork.

¹⁹ But preferring death with honor to life with religious defilement, he proceeded voluntarily to the torture instrument,

²⁰ spitting out the meat. In this, he showed how everyone ought to stand fast and reject what isn't lawful to taste despite the intense desire to live.

²¹ But those in charge of the unlawful sacrifice, because they had known the man for a long time, took him aside in private and urged him to bring meat that was lawful, prepared beforehand by himself, and then pretend to eat the meat from the sacrifice that the king commanded.

²² By doing this he might escape death and attain friendly treatment because of his old friendship with them.

²³ But adopting a dignified perspective worthy of his seniority, his distinguished old age and the gray hair he had acquired, and worthy of his excellent conduct from childhood, and, moreover, worthy of the holy and God-created laws, he declared to them to send him to the grave¹ immediately:

Eleazar

²⁴ "It's not worthy of our old age to act out such a role. Otherwise, many of the young would assume wrongly that Eleazar the 90-year-old had changed to a foreign way of life.

²⁵ If I acted out this charade for the sake of living a moment longer, I would mislead them, and I would be defiled and dishonored in my old age.

²⁶ Even if I escaped the punishment of human beings for the moment, I would certainly not escape the hands of the almighty-- whether alive or dead.

²⁷ So I give up my life courageously now to show myself worthy of my old age,

²⁸ and to leave a fine example for the young people of how to die a good death with eagerness and dignity for the revered and sacred laws."

Narrator

After he spoke, he immediately approached the torture instrument.

²⁹ Those who had shown goodwill toward him earlier now felt hostility toward him,² because the words he had spoken seemed insane to them.

³⁰ When his life was about to end from the beating, he groaned,

Eleazar

"It is clear to the Lord with his sacred knowledge that, although I could have been saved from death, I endure in my body harsh pain from this beating, yet in my soul, I cheerfully suffer these things because I respect him."

Narrator

³¹ In this manner he died, and his own death left behind a most noble and memorable example of virtue not only for the youth but also for the majority of his nation.

Martyrdom of 7 Brothers

Narrator

7:1 There were also seven brothers who were arrested along with their mother. The king was trying to compel them to eat the forbidden pork by torturing them with whips and cords.

² One of them, speaking on behalf of the others, said,

1st Brother

"What do you hope to ask and learn from us?

We are prepared to die rather than sin against our ancestral laws."

Narrator

³ The king became angry and commanded frying pans and cauldrons to be heated.

⁴ As soon as they were hot, he commanded that the one acting as spokesman have his tongue cut out, be scalped, and have his hands and feet cut off while the rest of his brothers and his mother watched.

⁵ After the brother was maimed and utterly helpless, the king commanded him to be brought to the fire and fried alive. Although the smoke from the pan had spread widely, the brothers and their mother encouraged each other to die honorably, saying,

Mother/
Brothers

⁶ "The Lord God truly watches over us and will come to our aid. Moses testified to this in his song against them, saying, 'God will have compassion on his servants.'"

Narrator

⁷ After the 1st brother died in this manner, they led forward the 2nd one with mockery. They ripped off the skin of his head along with the hair and demanded,

Tormentors

"Will you eat before every part of your body is punished limb by limb?"

Narrator

⁸ But he answered in his native language,

2nd Brother

"Not at all."

Narrator

Therefore, this brother also received in turn the same punishment as the 1st.

⁹ With his last breath he said,

2nd Brother

"You, who are marked out for vengeance, may take our present life, but the king of the universe for whose laws we die will resurrect us again to eternal life."

Narrator

¹⁰ After this, the 3rd one was mocked. When it was demanded, he put out his tongue quickly, extended his hands courageously,

¹¹ and stated with dignity,

3rd Brother

"I have received these limbs from heaven, and I give them up for the sake of God's laws. But I hope to recover them from God again."

Narrator

¹² The king and those with him marveled at the young man's spirit since he considered his agonies nothing.

¹³ After this one had died; the tormentors tortured the 4th brother as well.

¹⁴ When the end was approaching, he said,

4th Brother

"Death at the hands of humans is preferable since we look forward to the hope that God gives of being raised by him. But for you, there will be no resurrection to life."

Narrator

¹⁵ Immediately afterward, they led the 5th brother forward and began to torture him.

¹⁶ While looking at the king he said,

5th Brother

"You, though human, have power among human beings and do what you want.

But don't think that God has abandoned our people.

¹⁷ Just wait and observe his great strength, when God will torture you and your children."

Narrator

¹⁸ After him they brought forward the 6th brother. As he was about to die, he said,

6th Brother

"Don't deceive yourself in vain. We suffer these things because of our own sins against our God. Things worthy of wonder have happened.

¹⁹ But don't think you will escape unpunished after trying to fight against God."

Narrator ²⁰ The mother was particularly amazing and worthy of honorable memory. She watched her 7 sons die in the course of a single day but accepted it with a stout heart because of her hope in the Lord.
²¹ She encouraged each of them in their native language. Filled with noble thoughts, she fired up her womanly reasoning with manly courage, saying to them,

Mother ²² "I don't know how you grew in my womb, nor did I grant the breath of life to you or arrange what makes you who you are.
²³ For this reason, the creator of the world-- who brought about the beginning of humanity and searched out the origin of all things-- will again mercifully give you both spirit and life, since you disregard yourselves because of his laws."

Narrator ²⁴ Antiochus thought that he was being treated with contempt and was suspicious of the tone of her voice. So, he appealed to the youngest son, since he was still alive, not only through words but also through solemn pledges. If the young man turned from his ancestral practices, Antiochus promised him, he would make him both rich and prosperous, he would be considered a political advisor, and he would be entrusted with public affairs.
²⁵ When the young man wouldn't accept the offer by any means, the king appealed to the mother to counsel the boy to save himself.
²⁶ After a great deal of urging, she agreed to try to persuade her son.
²⁷ By leaning toward her son and mocking the savage tyrant, she spoke in their native language:

Mother "Son, pity me who carried you in the womb 9 months, nursed you for 3 years, nurtured you, and brought you into this stage of life with care.
²⁸ I beg you, child, to look at heaven and earth. See everything that is in them and know that God made these things from nothing and created humankind in the same way.
²⁹ Don't fear this killer but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death so that in God's mercy I should recover you with your brothers."

Narrator ³⁰ Just at the moment when she finished speaking, the young man said,

Last Brother "What are you all waiting for? I don't intend to obey the king's order, but I hear the command of the Law given to our ancestors through Moses.
³¹ But you, King, who have invented all sorts of evil against the Hebrews, will by no means escape God's power.
³² We are suffering because of our own sins.
³³ If our living Lord is angry for a short time in order to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants.
³⁴ But you, unholy man, the most bloodstained of all people, don't be so proud without having cause. Bloated by futile hope, you raise up your hand against the children of heaven.
³⁵ You haven't at all escaped the judgment of the almighty God, who oversees all.
³⁶ Now our brothers, who endured pain for a short time, have been given eternal life under God's covenant, but you will suffer the penalty of your arrogance by the righteous judgment of God.
³⁷ Just like my brothers, I give up both body and life for the ancestral laws. I call upon God to be merciful to the nation without delay, and to make you confess, after you suffer trials and diseases, that only he is God.
³⁸ Also I hope through me and my brothers to stop the anger of the almighty, who is justly punishing our entire nation."

Narrator ³⁹ Bitterly annoyed at the young boy's contempt, the king grew angry and treated him worse than the others.
⁴⁰ And this brother then died with integrity, trusting entirely in the Lord.
⁴¹ Last, after her sons, the mother died.
⁴² So then with regard to the eating of sacrificial meats and the extreme tortures they suffered, let this account be sufficient.

The author of the NT book Hebrews wrote the famous chapter on faith (chap. 11) to a congregation undergoing some form of persecution.

Hebrews 10:32-39 (CEB Common English Bible)

³² But remember the earlier days, after you saw the light. You stood your ground while you were suffering from an enormous amount of pressure.

³³ Sometimes you were exposed to insults and abuse in public. Other times you became partners with those who were treated that way.

³⁴ You even showed sympathy toward people in prison and accepted the confiscation of your possessions with joy, since you knew that you had better and lasting possessions.

³⁵ So don't throw away your confidence-- it brings a great reward.

³⁶ You need to endure so that you can receive the promises after you do God's will.

³⁷ In a little while longer, the one who is coming will come and won't delay;

³⁸ but my righteous one will live by faith, and my whole being won't be pleased with anyone who shrinks back.¹

³⁹ But we aren't the sort of people who timidly draw back and end up being destroyed. We're the sort of people who have faith so that our whole beings are preserved.

Hebrews 11:1-2, 32-40 (CEB)

Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don't see.

² The elders in the past were approved because they showed faith.

³² What more can I say? I would run out of time if I told you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets.

³³ Through faith they conquered kingdoms, brought about justice, realized promises, shut the mouths of lions,

³⁴ put out raging fires, escaped from the edge of the sword, found strength in weakness, were mighty in war, and routed foreign armies.

³⁵ Women received back their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured and refused to be released so they could gain a better resurrection.

³⁶ But others experienced public shame by being taunted and whipped; they were even put in chains and in prison.

³⁷ They were stoned to death, they were cut in two, and they died by being murdered with swords. They went around wearing the skins of sheep and goats, needy, oppressed and mistreated.

³⁸ The world didn't deserve them. They wandered around in deserts, mountains, caves, and holes in the ground.

³⁹ All these people didn't receive what was promised, though they were given approval for their faith.

⁴⁰ God provided something better for us so they wouldn't be made perfect without us.

Questions:

1. What did you learn about this challenging period of history that you did not know before?

I found it interesting that the martyrs saw their torture as God punishing them for their sins and that it was a good thing since He was not waiting for them to "fill up" all their sin like He did other nations (which made me remember the nations that inhabited the Promised Land before it was given to the Jews).

Also, the amount of torture they endured was so extreme. I cannot imagine what the brothers and mother felt as they watched the brothers be tortured to death. But it did not cause them to waiver in their resolve to stay true to their faith. They believed God would reward them. And Eleazar believed that his resistance and death would be an example to the young to stand firm and not give in to the pressure.

I appreciate the details of this time and a look into how the Jews were thinking.

2. What did you learn about martyrdom? About God? About sin?

Martyrdom was preferred by the Jews than living a life in apostasy. God does not save you from a gruesome death but is glorified when you stay true to him in the face of evil...a hard thing to say for sure. Sin is to be avoided at all cost which means it is much more serious in the eyes of God than many believe.

3. What was the attitude of this writer toward the Greek?

The writer saw the Greeks as evil, brutal, and unrelenting. They would not stop their campaign to eradicate the Jewish faith. They appear to be completely heartless except for the one time when the king tried to get that last son to choose differently with promises of wealth and position. Overall, they were a force to be resisted at all cost.

4. How has your understanding of the Jews living before the time of Jesus changed?

My understanding has expanded immensely! Before I really knew nothing about this time in their history...except for a faint knowledge of Hanukkah being from this time. I now know that they were a people that after the captivity were willing to fight for what they believed and resist the invaders who would steal their identity and thus take God out of the world. To have lived independently for 100 years after their resistance while the Greeks ruled the rest of the known world is incredible and a witness to God's faithfulness and power to save a nation. God had a plan and was faithful to see it succeed. He molded and shaped the Jewish nation during this time so that it was ready for the Messiah and what would come next. Who knew how the Greek culture would influence the future of mankind? ...God did.

5. What does this background add to your understanding of the teaching given by the author of Hebrews? Why do you think he included these well-known stories about the Jewish martyrs from this time?

This background adds more people to the Hall of Faith...from another time of persecution and trial for the Jewish people who had to stay true to their beliefs in order for their nation to survive. The writer of Hebrews may have included these stories to remind his readers of memories that were probably fresher in their minds. To help them see how their trials are an extension of what God has done in the past and His faithfulness to be with them through it all.

Week 3: Spiritual Learning Journal

Read Matthew 2 below from a more literal translation, laid out in a narrative format.

Visit of Magi from the East

- Narrator In the time of **King Herod**, after Jesus was born in **Bethlehem of Judea**, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,² asking,
- Magi "Where is the child who *has been born king of the Jews*? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage."
- Narrator ³ When **King Herod** heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him,
- Chief Priest/
Scribes "In **Bethlehem of Judea**; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people, Israel.'" [citation]
- Narrator ⁷ Then **Herod** secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying,
- Herod** "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."
- Narrator ⁹ When they had heard **the king**, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.
- #### Escape to Egypt
- Narrator ¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,
- Angel of Lord "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for **Herod** is about to search for the child, to destroy him."
- Narrator ¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod.

This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet,

"Out of Egypt, I have called my son." [citation]

Massacre of the Infants

Narrator ¹⁶ When **Herod** saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around **Bethlehem** who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.

¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled because they are no more." [citation]

Return from Egypt

¹⁹ When **Herod** died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said,

Angel of Lord ²⁰ "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead."

Narrator ²¹ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel.

²² But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.

And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee.

²³ There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled,

"He will be called a Nazorean." [citation???

Additional Background Information

1. **The Magi.** Religious Studies Professor Kristen Swenson summarizes the mystery associated with the magi. Who were they? Why these gifts?

Article from *Time* magazine:

"Well, from where exactly in the Orient (which means simply "East") were they, anyway? Matthew's word Magi is a vague clue since it can mean astronomers, wise men, or magicians, and was applied to people from all over. The gifts they bore—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—hint at Arabia since unrelated Bible stories describe camel trains of similar tribute emanating from Sheba and Midian, both on that peninsula. Their interest in stars suggests Babylon, famous for its astrologers. The happiest guess of all turned out to be the one made in the 4th century by the decorators of the Church of the Nativity in Palestine, whose golden entry

mosaic featured the Magi dressed as Persians, also renowned stargazers. When actual Persians came marauding in 614, it was the only place of worship they didn't torch..."

Why gold, frankincense, and myrrh?

Then, like now, gold represented wealth and power. Frankincense was a type of incense and perfume. Myrrh has been used as a perfume in ancient Egypt, in embalming processes, and which Christians have interpreted as foreshadowing Jesus's death. In Mark 15:23, Jesus is offered wine with myrrh before his crucifixion, as a painkiller. Myrrh would also be used in oil used for anointing kings.

2. Bethlehem, the city of David.

Bethlehem is closely associated with the Davidic monarchy. In the book of Ruth, Elimelek and Naomi were from Bethlehem, and Naomi returned to Bethlehem from Moab with her widowed daughter-in-law Ruth, who married her kinsman-redeemer Boaz. Ruth and Boaz were the ancestors of King David (Ruth 4:17-22). The prophet Samuel anointed David as King of Israel in Bethlehem (1 Sam. 16:1-13). The prophet Micah prophesied that God was going to raise up a new Davidic king from the city of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2).

3. The Symbolism of Egypt.

We have discussed the preference of many Jews for living in Alexandria Egypt. Read the short article on Egypt in Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology at <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/egypt/> How might those living in the 1st c. understand the imagery of the role Egypt plays in Jesus' life and the purposes of God for bringing Him out of Egypt again?

Questions to Consider:

1. Explain what seems to be Matthew's play on the title "king of the Jews" found in chapter 2 from what you learned from this week's lesson.

I don't think I see how Matthew makes a play on this title. The magi come and inquire of Herod as to where to find the child who has been born "king of the Jews". Herod becomes afraid because he is "king" even if it is just in name only since the Romans really rule Judea and he only serves in this role with their permission. He obviously feels that this baby king will have more power than he does himself and could replace him (maybe overthrow the Romans?), but then he is use to killing off all who in his mind pose a threat. He also seems to take this inquiry seriously since these affluent men have brought valuable gifts and wish to pay homage to this baby. This makes me wonder what Herod knew or had heard that would lead him to believe this was a true threat.

2. Choose two other background issues that help clarify Matthew's message. What did you learn that you had never seen before? In what way has your understanding of this chapter been stretched or deepened by knowing more about these two issues?

I have always found the star a fascinating part of this story. When did the magi first see this star? How did it "lead" them? Was it stationary and off in the distance or was it closer and move as they travelled like the pillar of fire or cloud that guided the Israelites in the wilderness? It must have disappeared when the magi came to Herod since they were asking him where to find the child, but then it reappeared and guided them to Bethlehem or wherever Mary and Joseph had set up house at that time since Jesus would no longer be an infant. I am not sure if I learned something new here since this has been a topic I have pondered for a long time, but I do enjoy painting the mental pictures and seeing what new questions pop into my mind.

The second background issue is the magi themselves. Who were they? How many were they? Did they travel with an entourage? From where did they come and hence how far did they travel? The star must have been very impressive for them to decide to take on this journey. This also tells me that God speaks to many people and not just the Jews. This baby was important for so many other people than just the chosen people since He would be Lord of Lords and King of Kings...Ruler of the whole world. From the lowest (the shepherd boys) to the mightiest (the magi), all were told of His birth so that they could come and worship Him.

One thing that I did learn, and mostly from the article on Egypt, was the different roles Egypt played in Israel's history. From a place of refuge to a place of oppression to an ally to a commercial partner, it has spanned all the possible roles that I can personally think of. This article spelled them out very clearly from the beginning with Abraham to the time of Herod. Fascinating. There is always something more to learn and, remembering that God has "threads" through His Word, this will give me another way of looking at those passages where Egypt is mentioned. I wonder if there is a pattern here.