



**The Martyrdom of the Mother and Her Seven Sons  
(The Apocrypha: II Maccabees 7:1-42)**

- 1) At that time seven brothers, too, with their mother were arrested, and the king tortured them with whips and thongs in an effort to force them to partake of pork contrary to the prohibitions of the Torah.
- 2) One of them as spokesman for all said, "what do you expect to learn from questioning us? We are ready to die rather than violate the laws of our forefathers."
- 3) The king, enraged, ordered griddles and cauldrons to be heated red-hot.
- 4) As soon as they were red-hot, the king gave the order to cut out the tongue of the one who had acted as spokesman and scalp him and cut off his hands and feet while his brothers and mother look on.
- 5) The body was now completely helpless, but the king ordered that he be brought, still breathing, to the fire and fried. As the odor of frying began to spread widely, the brothers and their mother exhorted one another to die nobly, saying,
- 6) "The Lord God looks on and truly is relenting concerning us, as Moses declared in the Song Which Confronts as a Witness: 'And He will relent concerning his servants.'"
- 7) When the first of the brothers had passed away in this manner, they brought the second to be wantonly tortured, and after ripping his scalp by the hair, they asked him, "Will you eat before your body is torn limb from limb?"
- 8) He answered in the language of his forefathers, "No!" And so, he, too, in turn was tortured.
- 9) With his last breath, he said, "You, you fiend, are making us depart from our present life, but the King of the universe will resurrect us, who die for the sake of His laws, to a new eternal life."
- 10) After him, the third was subjected to wanton torture. On demand, he promptly put forth his tongue and cheerfully held out his hands.
- 11) His words were noble: "I received these from Heaven, and for the sake of His laws I hold them cheap. From Him I hope to receive them back."
- 12) The King himself and his men were astonished at the spirit of the young man who set torments at naught.
- 13) When he, too, had passed away, they tormented the fourth with similar tortures.
- 14) At the point of death, he said, "Better it is to pass away from among men while looking forward in hope to the fulfillment of God's promises that we will be resurrected by Him, for you shall have no resurrection unto life."
- 15) Forthwith they brought the fifth and began to torture him.
- 16) Gazing at the king, he said, "You wield power among men and work your will, but you are mortal. Think not that God has abandoned our people.
- 17) You wait and see His great might when He puts you and your seed to the torture!"
- 18) Thereafter, they brought the sixth, and as he was about to die, he said, "Do not indulge in vain delusions! Through our own fault we are subjected to these sufferings, because we have sinned against our God. They pass belief!
- 19) You, however, think not to escape unpunished after having dared to contend with God!"
- 20) Most remarkable was the mother. She deserves to be held in glorious memory, for she looked on as her seven sons perished in the course of a single day and bore it bravely because of her hopes in the Lord.
- 21) Each one of them in turn she exhorted in the language of their forefathers. Filled with noble resolution, she took her womanly thoughts and fired them with a manly spirit, as she told them,



- 22) "I do not know how you came to be in my womb. It was not I who gave you spirit and life, nor did I determine the order of the composition of the elements of each of you.
- 23) Surely, then, the Creator of the universe, Who shaped man's coming into being and fathomed the fashioning of everything, with mercy will restore spirit and life to you, inasmuch as you now hold your very selves cheap for the sake of His laws."
- 24) Antiochus sensed he was being treated with contempt. The reproachful voice roused his hostility. Nevertheless, there was still the youngest, and Antiochus not only addressed appeals to him again and again; he even made repeated promises on oath to make him rich and prosperous and admit him to the Order of the King's Friends and entrust important functions to him, provided he would depart from the ways of his forefathers.
- 25) When the youth paid him no heed, the king called upon the mother and urged her to give the lad the advice that would save his life.
- 26) In response to his insistent urgings, she consented to convince her son.
- 27) She bent over him, and with scorn for the cruel tyrant, she said in the language of her forefathers, "My son, have pity on me who carried you in my womb for nine months and nursed you for three years and reared you and brought you to your present age.
- 28) I ask you, my child, to look upon the heaven and the earth and to contemplate all therein. I ask you to understand that it was not after they existed that God fashioned them, and in the same manner the human race comes to be.
- 29) Do not fear this executioner, but be worthy of your brothers, and accept death, so that in His mercy I may recover you along with your brothers."
- 30) She was still speaking the last of these words when the youth said, "What are you waiting for? I refuse to obey the king's command; I heed the command of the Torah given through Moses to our forefathers.
- 31) You, who have devised all evil against the Hebrews, shall surely not escape the hands of God.
- 32) As for us, we are suffering for our own sins.
- 33) If our living Lord has for a short time become angry with us in order to chastise and teach us, He will again become reconciled with his servants.
- 34) You, however, you impious wretch, most bloodstained of all men, do not soar with vain delusions as false hopes give you the insolence to lift your hand against the children of Heaven.
- 35) You have not yet escaped the judgment of Almighty God, Who watches over us.
- 36) My brothers, having borne pain for a short while, now have inherited eternal life under the terms of God's covenant, whereas you shall suffer through the judgment of God the just punishment for your arrogance.
- 37) I, following my brothers' example, give up my body and soul for the sake of the laws of our forefathers, praying to God that he speedily have mercy upon our nation. May you through being afflicted and scourged come to acknowledge that He alone is God.
- 38) With me and my brothers may the Almighty put an end to the rightful anger inflicted upon our entire people."
- 39) Enraged, the king, in his resentment over being mocked, treated him still worse than the others.
- 40) So he perished undefiled, having put his trust entirely in the Lord.
- 41) And last, after her sons, died the mother.
- 42) Let us end here the stories of compulsion by extreme torture to partake of the meat of pagan sacrifices.



**Lamentations Rabbah 1:50 איכה רבה 1:50**

<p>ג) מעשה במרים בת נחתום שנשבית היא ושבעה בניה נטלן קיסר ונתנן לגיו מן שבעה קנקלין הביא את הראשון ואמר לו השתחוה לצלם אמר לו ח"ו איני משתחוה לצלם</p>	<p>50. It is related of Miriam, the daughter of Tanhum<sup>1</sup>, that she was taken captive with her seven sons. The emperor took and placed them in the innermost of seven rooms. He had the eldest brought and said to him, 'Prostrate yourself before the image.' He answered, 'God forbid! I will not prostrate myself before an image.'</p>
<p>אמר לו למה מפני שכך כתיב בתורתנו (שמות כ') אנכי ה' אלהיך מיד הוציאו והרגו</p>	<p>'Why?' asked the king. 'Because it is written in our Torah, <i>I am the Lord thy God</i>' (Exod. XX, 2). He immediately had him taken out and slain.</p>
<p>הוציא השני ואמר לו השתחוה לצלם א"ל ח"ו אחי לא השתחוה ואני איני משתחוה</p>	<p>He had the second one brought and said to him, 'Prostrate yourself before the image.' He answered, 'God forbid! My brother did not prostrate himself and I will not.'</p>
<p>אמר לו למה אמר לו שכך כתיב בתורה (שם) לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים על פני מיד גזר עליו והרגוהו</p>	<p>'Why?' the king asked. He replied, 'Because it is thus written in our Torah, <i>Thou shall have no other gods before Me</i>' (ib. 3). He immediately ordered him to be slain.</p>
<p>הוציא השלישי ואמר לו השתחוה לצלם א"ל איני משתחוה</p>	<p>He had the third brought and said to him, 'Prostrate yourself before the image.' He answered, 'I will not prostrate myself.'</p>
<p>אמר לו למה [א"ל] שכתוב בתורה (שם) ל"ד) כי לא תשתחוה לאל אחר מיד גזר עליו והרגוהו</p>	<p>'Why?' the king asked. 'Because it is written in the Torah, <i>For thou shalt bow down to no other god</i>' (ib. XXXIV, 14). He immediately ordered him to be slain.</p>
<p>הוציא הרביעי ואמר פסוקיה (שם כ"ב) זובח לאלהים יתרם גזר עליו והרגוהו</p>	<p>He had the fourth brought who quoted, <i>He that sacrificeth unto the gods, save unto the Lord only, shall be utterly destroyed</i> (ib. XXII, 19), and he was ordered to be slain.</p>
<p>הוציא החמישי ואמר גם הוא פסוקיה (דברים ו') שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד מיד גזר עליו והרגוהו</p>	<p>He had the fifth brought, who also quoted, <i>Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one</i> (Deut. VI, 4), and he was immediately ordered to be slain.</p>
<p>הוציא הששי ואמר גם הוא פסוקיה (שם ז') כי ה' אלהיך בקרבך אל גדול ונורא גזר עליו והרגוהו</p>	<p>He had the sixth brought who likewise quoted, <i>For the Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a God great and awful</i> (ib. VII, 21), and he was ordered to be slain.</p>
<p>הוציא השביעי והוא היה קטן שבכולן אמר בני השתחוה לצלם אמר לו ח"ו</p>	<p>He had the seventh brought, who was the youngest of them all, and the king said, 'My son, prostrate yourself before the image.' He answered, 'God forbid!'</p>

<sup>1</sup> Not 'Nahtum' as in the Hebrew text. In Git. 57b the name of the woman was not given. A similar story is related of a woman named Hannah in connection with the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes.



א"ל למה 'Why?' asked the king.

א"ל שקן כתיב בתורתנו  
(שם ד') וידעת היום  
והשבות אל לבבך כי ה' הוא  
האלהים בשמים ממעל ועל  
הארץ מתחת אין עוד ולא  
עוד אלא שנשבענו לאלהינו  
שאין אנו ממירין אותו באל  
אחר שנאמר (שם כ"ו) את  
ה' האמרת היום וכשם  
שנשבענו לו כך נשבע לנו  
שאין ממירנו באומה אחרת  
שנא' (דברים כ"ד) וה'  
האמירך היום

Because it is thus written in our Torah, *Know this day, and lay it to thy heart, that the Lord, He is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is none else (ib. IV, 39)*. Not only that, but we have sworn to our God that we will not exchange Him for any other god; as it is said, *Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God (ib. XXVI, 17)*. And as we swore to Him, so He swore to us not exchange us for another people; as it is said, *And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His own treasure' (ib. 18)*.

א"ל קיסר אהיך שבעו ימים ושבעו  
חיים וראו טובה ואתה קטן לא  
שבעת ימים ולא שבעת חיים ולא  
ראית טוב בעולם השתחוה לצלם  
ואעשה בך טובות

The emperor said to him, 'Your brothers had had their fill of years and of life and had experienced happiness; but you are young, you have had no fill of years and life and have not yet experienced happiness. Prostrate yourself before the image and I will bestow favours upon you.'

א"ל כתיב בתורתנו (שמות  
ט"ו) ה' ימלוך לעולם ועד  
ואומר (תהלים י') ה' מלך  
עולם ועד אבדו גוים מארצו  
ואתם בטלים ואויביו בטלים  
ב"ו היום ח' ולמחר מת היום  
עשיר ולמחר עני אבל  
הקב"ה חי וקיים לעולם  
ולעולמי עולמים

He replied, 'It is written in our Torah, *The Lord shall reign for ever and ever (Ex. XV, 18)*, and it is said, *The Lord is King for ever; the nations are perished out of His land (Ps. X, 16)*. You are of no account and so are His enemies. A human being lives to-day and is dead to-morrow, rich to-day, and poor to-morrow; but the Holy One, blessed be He, lives and endures for all eternity.'

א"ל קיסר ראה אחיך הרוגים לפניך  
והריני משליך טבעתי לארץ לפני  
הצלם והגביהה כדי שידעו הכל  
ששמעת לקולי

The emperor said to him, 'See, your brothers are slain before you. Behold I will throw my ring to the ground in front of the image; pick it up so that all may know that you have obeyed my command.'

א"ל תבל עליך קיסר מה אם  
אתה מתיירא מבני אדם  
שכמותך אני לא אתיירא  
ממ"ה הקב"ה אלהי עולם

He answered, 'Woe unto you, O emperor! If you are as afraid of human beings who are the same as yourself, shall I not fear the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, the God of the universe!'

א"ל וכי יש אלוה לעולם

He asked him, 'Has, then, the universe a God?'

א"ל אללי עליך קיסר וכי  
עולם של הפקד ראית

He replied, 'Shame on you, O emperor! Do you, then, behold a world without a Master!'

א"ל וכי יש פה לאלהיכם

He asked, 'Has your God a mouth?'

א"ל באלהיכם כתיב (תהלים  
קט"ו) פה להם ולא ידברו  
ובאלהינו כתיב (שם ל"ג)  
בדבר ה' שמים נעשו

He answered, 'In connection with your gods it is written, *They have mouths, but they speak not (ib. CXV, 15)*; in connection with our God it is written, *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made (ib. XXXIII, 6)*.



- א"ל וכי יש עינים לאלהיכם  
א"ל באלהיכם כתיב עינים  
להם ולא יראו ובאלהינו  
כתיב (זכריה ד') עיני ה'  
המה משוטטים בכל הארץ
- 'Has your God eyes?'  
He answered, 'In connection with your gods it is written, *Eyes have they, but they see not (ib. CXV, 5)*; in connection with our God it is written, *The eyes of the Lord, that run to and fro through the whole earth*' (Zech. IV, 10)
- א"ל וכי יש אזנים לאלהיכם  
א"ל באלהיכם כתיב אזנים  
להם ולא ישמעו ובאלהינו  
כתיב (מלאכי ג') ויקשב ה'  
וישמע
- 'Has your God ears?'  
He answered, 'In connection with your gods it is written, *They have ears, but they hear not (Ps. CXV, 6)*; in connection with our God it is written, *'the Lord hearkened, and heard'* (Mal. III, 16).
- א"ל וכי יש אף לאלהיכם  
א"ל באלהיכם כתיב אף  
להם ולא יריחון ובאלהינו  
כתיב (בראשית ח') וירח ה'  
את ריח הניחוח
- 'Has your God a nose?'  
He answered, 'In connection with your gods it is written, *Noses have they, but they smell not (Ps. Loc. Cit.)*; in connection with our God it is written, *And the Lord smelled the sweet savour*' (Gen. VIII, 21).
- א"ל וכי יש ידיים לאלהיכם  
א"ל באלהיכם כתיב ידיהם  
ולא ימישון ובאלהינו כתיב  
(ישעיה מ"ח) אף ידי יסדה  
ארץ
- 'Has your God hands?'  
He answered, 'In connection with your gods it is written, *They have hands, but they handle not (Ps. CXV, 7)*; in connection with our God it is written, *Yea, My hand hath laid the foundation of the earth*' (Isa. XLVIII, 13).
- א"ל וכי יש רגלים לאלהיכם  
א"ל באלהיכם כתיב רגליהם  
ולא יהלכו ובאלהינו כתיב  
(זכריה י"ד) ועמדו רגליו  
ביום ההוא על הר הזיתים
- 'Has your God feet?'  
He answered 'In connection with your gods it is written, *Feet have they, but they walk not (Ps. Loc. Cit.)*; in connection with our God it is written, *And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives*' (Zech. XIV, 4).
- אמר לו וכי יש גרון לאלהיכם  
א"ל באלהיכם כתיב ולא  
יהגו בגרונם ובאלהינו כתיב  
(איוב ל"ו) והגה מפיו יצא
- 'Has your God a throat?'  
He answered, 'In connection with your gods it is written, *Neither speak they with their throat (Ps. Loc. Cit.)*; in connection with our God it is written, *And sound goeth out of His Mouth*' (Job XXXVII, 2).
- א"ל אם יש בו כל המדות הללו  
באלהיכם מפני מה אינו מציל אתכם  
מידי כמו שהציל לחנניה מישאל  
ועזריה מיד נבוכדנצר
- The king asked, 'If there are all these attributes in your God, why does He not deliver you out of my hand in the same manner that He reschedule Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah from the hands of Nebuchadnezzar?'

ראשון



א"ל חנניה מישאל ועזריה  
כשרים היו ונבוכדנצר מלך  
הגון היה ליעשות נס על ידי  
אבל אתה אינך הגון ואנו  
נתחייבנו מיתה לשמים אם אין  
אתה הורגנו הרבה הורגים יש  
למקום הרבה דובים הרבה  
זאבים ואריות ונחשים ונמרים  
ועקרבים שיפגעו בנו ויהרגנו  
אלא לסוף הקב"ה עתיד  
ליפרע ממך את דמינו מיד גזר  
עליו להורגו

אמרה לו אמו בחיי רעשך קיסר תנה  
את בני ואחבקו ואנשקו ונתנוה  
לה והוציאה לו דדיה והניקתו חלב

אמרה לו בחיי ראשך קיסר הרגני  
תחלה ואחר כך הרגהו  
אמר לה קיסר איני שומע לך  
מפני שכתוב בתורתכם (ויקרא  
כ"ב) ושור או שה אותו ואת  
בנו לא דשחטו ביום אחד

אמרה לו שוטה שבעולם כבר קיימת  
כל המצות ולא נשאר לך אלא זו  
בלבד מיד צוה עליו להרגו

נפלה אמו עליו והיתה מחבקתו  
ומנשקתו ואמרה לו בני לך אצל  
אברהם אביכם ואמור לו כך אמרה  
אמי אל תזוח דעתך עליך ותאמר  
בניתי מזבח והעליתי את יצחק בני  
הרי אמנו בנתה שבעה מזבחות  
והעלתה שבעה בנים ביום אחד  
אתה נסיון ואני מעשה עד שהיתה  
מנשקתו ומחבקתו גזר עליו והרגוהו  
עליו

וכיון שנהרג שיערו חכמים שנותיו  
של אותו תימוק ונמצא בן שתי שנים  
וששה חדשים ושש שעות ומחצה  
באותה שעה צעקו כל או"ה ואמרו ה  
אלהיהם של אלו עושה להם שכך  
נהרגין עליו בכל שעה ועליהם כתיב  
(תהלים מ"ד) כי עליך הורגנו כל  
היום

לאחר ימים נשתטית אותה האשה  
ונפלה מן הגג ומתה לקיים מה שנא'  
(ירמיה ט"ו) אומללה יולדת השבעה  
ובת קול יוצאת ואומרת (תהלים  
קי"ג) אם הבנים שמחה ורוח הקדש  
צווחת ואומרת על אלה אני בוכיה

He answered, 'Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were worthy men, and king Nebuchadnezzar was deserving that a miracle should be performed through him. You, however, are undeserving; and as for ourselves, our lives are forfeit to heaven. If you do not slay us, the Omnipresent has numerous executioners. There are many bears, wolves, serpents, leopards, and scorpions to attack and kill us; but in the end the Holy One, blessed be He, will avenge our blood on you.' The king immediately ordered him to be put to death.

The child's mother said to him, 'By the life of your head, O emperor, give me my son that I may embrace and kiss him.' They gave him to her, and she bared her breasts and suckled him.

She said to the king, 'By the life of your head, O emperor, put me to death first and then slay him.'

He answered her, 'I cannot agree to that because it is written in your Torah, *And whether it be cow or ewe, ye shall not kill it and its young both in one day*' (Lev. XXII, 28).

She retorted, 'You unutterable fool! Have you already fulfilled all the commandments save only this one!' He immediately ordered him to be slain.

The mother threw herself upon her child and embraced and kissed him. She said to him, 'My son, go to the patriarch Abraham and tell him, "Thus said my mother, 'Do not preen yourself [on your righteousness], saying I built an altar and offered up my son, Isaac.' Behold, our mother built seven altars and offered up seven sons in one day. Yours was only a test, but mine was in earnest.'" While she was embracing and kissing him, the king gave an order and they killed him in her arms.

When he had been slain, the Sages calculated the age of that child and found that he was two years, six months, and six and a half hours old. At that time all the peoples of the world cried out, 'What does their God do for them that they are all the time slain for His sake!' And concerning them it is written, *Nay, but for Thy sake are we killed all the day* (Ps. XLIV, 23).

After a few days the woman became demented and fell from a roof and died, to fulfill what is said, *She that hath borne seven languisheth* (Jer. XV, 9). A *Bath Kol* issued forth and proclaimed, 'A joyful mother of children' (Ps. CXIII, 9); and the Holy Spirit cried out, FOR THESE THINGS I WEEP.