

The Martyrdom of Eleazar

2 Maccabees 6:7-31

by Don Falkos

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A decree went out in the name of King Antiochus IV Epiphanes that Jews everywhere be compelled to follow the religious practices of the Greeks. Those who failed to comply were to be killed.

Two Jewish women who had had their sons circumcised were led through the city with their babies at their breasts. Then they were thrown from the city wall. One Sabbath, a group of Jews had gathered secretly in a cave to worship. They were burned alive. And because of their great respect for the Sabbath, they didn't even try to defend themselves.

Eleazar was an elderly teacher of the Law. One day some men tried to force him to eat meat from a pig that had been sacrificed to a pagan god. But he refused to eat what God had called unclean.

The men in charge of this unlawful sacrifice had known and respected Eleazar for a long time. They suggested, "Bring some meat of your own and pretend to eat the meat from the sacrificed pig. Then we won't have to kill you."

Eleazar replied, "Kill me! If I were to do as you propose, our young people would think I had given up my faith after ninety years, causing them to deny their faith. I might live a little longer, but I would be living in shame. Instead, I will show everyone how to die a noble death for the sake of our holy laws."

The same men who had tried to save him a moment before now beat him until he was dead. Eleazar praised God with his final breath, and just as he had hoped, his honorable death set an example not only for the young but for all the people of God.