

## Week 56, Lecture 176.<sup>1</sup> Judith, Chapter 1, Nebuchadnezzar's Power.

### Outline in NABRE<sup>2</sup> [For reference -- no need to include this in the lecture]

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|------|--|----------------|
| I.   | Assyrian Threat (1:1–3:10)                 | chapters 1-3   |
| II.  | Siege of Bethulia (4:1–7:32)               | chapters 4-7   |
| III. | Judith, Instrument of the Lord (8:1–10:10) | chapters 8-9   |
| IV.  | Judith Goes Out to War (10:11–13:20)       | chapters 10-13 |
| V.   | Victory and Thanksgiving (14:1–16:25)      | chapters 14-16 |

### Translation: RSV/PJM<sup>3</sup>

#### PART ONE: ASSYRIA ON THE MARCH, Judith 1-7

##### I. The Assyrian Threat, Judith 1-3<sup>4</sup>

**1:1-6, Fortification of Ecbatana**<sup>5</sup>. **1** In the twelfth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh, in the days of Arphaxad, who ruled over the Medes in Ecbatana -- <sup>2</sup> he is the king who built walls about **Ecbatana** with hewn stones three cubits thick and six cubits long; he made the walls seventy cubits high and fifty cubits wide; <sup>3</sup> at the gates he built towers a hundred cubits high and sixty cubits wide at the foundations; <sup>4</sup> and he made its gates, which were seventy cubits high and forty cubits wide, so that his armies could march out in force and his infantry form their ranks -- <sup>5</sup> it was in those days that King Nebuchadnezzar made war against King Arphaxad in the great plain which is on the borders of Ragau. <sup>6</sup> And all the people of the hill country **joined [or: opposed]** him and all those who lived along the Euphrates and the Tigris and the **Hydaspes** and in the plains where Arioch ruled the Elymeans. Many nations **joined [or: opposed]** the forces of the Chaldeans.

#### Verse 1, A Modern Analogy (to “Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled over the Assyrians”)

When Jefferson Davis was president of the United States, and Vermont seceded from the union, President Davis called on his chief general, George S. Patton to punish those in Vermont who had rejected his rule. General Patton left Pennsylvania, and passing through Georgia, lead his army to Vermont.

**My point.** There are plenty of obvious historical and geographical errors in Judith.

In fact, the errors are so blatant that some commentators think they are purposeful.

They alert the reader to the fact that this “novelette” is not history – not even in the ancient sense of the word!

Lawrence Wills calls it “mock history.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lectures numbered consecutively. This is this week's 1st lecture, but its number reflects its place in the **total** sequence.

<sup>2</sup> NABRE, Introduction to Judith. This introduction has been approved by the USCCB, and ultimately by Rome. It is thus part of the hierarchical magisterium of the Church.

Donald Senior, John J. Collins, and Mary Ann Getty, eds., *The Catholic Study Bible, 2nd Ed.: Notes*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 596.

<sup>3</sup> The translation is basically the RSV. At times I have modified it to make it more literal. At times I have modernized the language, e.g., “thou gavest” to “you gave.” I have also updated the spellings of place-names to agree with more modern translations, e.g., NRSV, NABRE, CEB.

<sup>4</sup> The Major Sections designated by Roman numerals are adapted from the NABRE.

<sup>5</sup> The paragraphing and paragraph titles are adapted from: *Septuaginta: A Reader's Edition*, ed. by Gregory R. Lanier and William A. Ross (Hendrickson, 2018). To these I have added some of my own.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence M. Wills, “The Book of Judith: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” *New Interpreter's Bible* (Abingdon, 1999) vol. 3, page 1097.

**Verse 2. Ecbatana.** The Book of Tobit portrays Jews living in this city of the Persian Empire. The magnificence of the city is stressed -- so that its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar makes him look invincible.

**V. 6, Joined? or Opposed? RSV / NETS.**

The Greek is ambiguous: "came together" (as allies? as opponents?)

He **was joined** by all the people (RSV); And there **rallied against him** all the inhabitants . . . (NETS)

The final sentence suffers from the same ambiguity. Did they "come together" as allies or opponents?

The final interpretation is the same either way.

The purpose of the introduction is to magnify the authority of Nebuchadnezzar.

If they are allies; it magnifies the extent of his authority.

If they are enemies, it shows how great was the defeated opponent.

**Hydaspes**, a river in India. Purpose: to show the vast extent of the empire of "Nebuchadnezzar, King of Assyria." He rules from the Tigris & Euphrates (Mesopotamia) all the way to India.

**Historically** Nebuchadnezzar was **never** king of Assyria! He was king of Babylon.

**1:7-10, Nebuchadnezzar Summons His Vassals for War.** <sup>7</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians sent to all who lived in Persia and to all who lived in the west, those who lived in Cilicia and Damascus and Lebanon and **Antilebanon** and all who lived along the seacoast, <sup>8</sup> and those among the nations of Carmel and Gilead, and Upper Galilee and the great Plain of Esdraelon, <sup>9</sup> and all who were in Samaria and its surrounding towns, and **beyond the Jordan** as far as Jerusalem and Bethany and Chelous and Kadesh and the river of Egypt, and Tahpanhes and Raamses and the whole land of Goshen, <sup>10</sup> even beyond Tanis and Memphis, and all who lived in Egypt as far as the borders of Ethiopia.

**Antilebanon**



Satellite image of Lebanon. The snow-covered areas nearer the coast are the Mount Lebanon Range. and the snow-covered areas further inland are the **Anti-Lebanon** mountain range.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Lebanon\\_Mountains](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Lebanon_Mountains)

**Beyond the Jordan** -- Depends on which side of the river you are on!

The modern country of “Jordan” is shortened from “Trans-Jordan” (from Israel’s perspective -- and **Europe’s!**)

The capital is Amman -- in OT times the Ammonites lived there.

One of the main characters the Book of Judith will be Achior the Ammonite.

However, from the perspective of Assyria, Israel and points south would be “across the Jordan.

**1:10-12, Disobedience & Royal Anger.** <sup>11</sup> But all who lived in the whole region disregarded the orders of Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians, and refused to join him in the war; for they were not afraid of him, but looked upon him as only one man, and they sent back his messengers empty-handed and shamefaced. <sup>12</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar was very angry with this whole region, and swore by his throne and kingdom that he would surely take revenge on the whole territory of **Cilicia** and Damascus and Syria, that he would kill them by the sword, and also all the inhabitants of the land of Moab, and the people of Ammon, **and all Judea**, and everyone in Egypt, **as far as the coasts of the two seas.**

**Treatment of Ambassadors.**

This is a culture of “honor and shame.” By shaming his ambassadors, the nations are snubbing Nebuchadnezzar.

**Verse 12. A Bit of Geography.**

**Cilicia.** This is a part of modern Turkey, right at the northeast corner of the Mediterranean.

**Coasts of the Two Seas.** Since this is near **Egypt**, it probably refers to the waters on either side of the Sinai Peninsula.

On the west side is the Gulf of Suez; on the east side is the Gulf of Aquaba.

These are both geographically part of what we call The Red Sea today.

Each of them is about twice the size of the Dead Sea, and many times larger than the “Sea” of Galilee.

**1:13-16, Nebuchadnezzar Defeats Arphaxad.** <sup>13</sup> **In the seventeenth year** he led his forces against King Arphaxad, and defeated him in battle, and overthrew the whole army of Arphaxad, and all his cavalry and all his chariots. <sup>14</sup> Thus he took possession of his cities, and came to Ecbatana, captured its towers, plundered its markets, and turned its beauty into shame. <sup>15</sup> He captured Arphaxad in the mountains of Ragau and struck him down with hunting spears; and he utterly destroyed him, to this day. <sup>16</sup> Then he returned with them to Nineveh, he and all his combined forces, a vast body of troops; and there he and his forces rested and feasted for one hundred and twenty days.

**The 17<sup>th</sup> Year.**

Wills thinks this is a reference to the historical Nebuchadnezzar, King of **Babylon** -- not Assyria!

In the 18th year of his reign (mentioned in 2:1) he captured Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup>

## Week 56, Lecture 177. Judith, Chapter 2, Holofernes Makes War

**Chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar’s Campaign vs. Western Territories.** **2:1** **In the eighteenth year**, on the twenty-second day of the first month, there was talk in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians about carrying out his revenge on the whole region, just as he said. <sup>2</sup> He called together all his officers and all his nobles and set forth to them his secret plan and recounted fully, with his own lips, all the wickedness of the region; <sup>3</sup> and it was decided that everyone who had not obeyed his command should be destroyed.

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<sup>8</sup> Wills, “Judith,” *NIB*, 3. 1099.

**The 18<sup>th</sup> Year.** In real history, this is the year Nebuchadnezzar (of Babylon) captured Jerusalem. The Book of Judith conducts a “thought experiment” of what **would** have happened if Israel had not sinned.

**4-13, Nebuchadnezzar & Holofernes.** <sup>4</sup> When he had finished setting forth his plan, Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians called **Holofernes**, the chief general of his army, second only to himself, and said to him, <sup>5</sup> **“Thus says the Great King**, the lord of the whole earth: **When you leave** my presence, take with you men confident in their strength, to the number of one hundred and twenty thousand foot soldiers and twelve thousand cavalry. <sup>6</sup> Go and attack the whole west country, because they disobeyed my orders. <sup>7</sup> Tell them to **prepare earth and water**, for I am coming against them in my anger, and will cover the whole face of the earth with the feet of my armies, and will hand them over to be plundered by my troops, <sup>8</sup> till their wounded shall fill their valleys, and every brook and river shall be filled with their dead, and overflow; <sup>9</sup> and I will lead them away captive to the ends of the whole earth. <sup>10</sup> You shall go and seize all their territory for me in advance. They will yield themselves to you, and you shall hold them for me till the day of their punishment. <sup>11</sup> But if they refuse, your eye shall not spare and you shall hand them over to slaughter and plunder throughout your whole region. <sup>12</sup> For as I live, and by the power of my kingdom, what I have spoken my hand will execute. <sup>13</sup> And you -- take care not to transgress any of your sovereign's commands, but be sure to carry them out just as I have ordered you; and do not delay about it.”

#### **Holofernes.**

There was in fact a Persian General Holofernes, who had an officer named Bagoas (chief eunuch in this story). They were involved in wars in Egypt and Judea in 350 and 343 B.C. Wills thinks our author is using a historical name “in a very unhistorical way.”<sup>9</sup>

#### **Verse 5, The Messenger Formula. “Thus says the Great King, . . .”**

**Probably the king himself would not have said this.** His words probably would have begun with “When you leave . . . . When an ambassador delivered the words of the king to someone else he would have added this formula

**“Thus says the Great King**, the lord of the whole earth

OT scholars call this “the messenger formula” because it was used by messengers / ambassadors.

After the formula, the messenger would repeat verbatim what the king had said.

In the Hebrew OT, the messenger formula is **used most often by prophets.**

“Thus says the LORD” [sometimes with additions, e.g., “the God of Israel,” etc.]

As soon as a prophet said these words people would recognize his **implicit** claims.

I have been in direct contact with YHWH and his heavenly court

He has appointed me as his ambassador.

Here is what he told me, word-for-word.

**Another Possibility:** By the time Judith is written, Jews think of “Thus says the LORD” as “God language.”

The author would then not be using the phrase in its ancient sense -- words used by ambassadors.

He would be using the phrase to show that Nebuchadnezzar was considering himself to be a god!

#### **Prepare Earth & Water.**

Wills quotes the Greek historian Herodotus. These are **Persian** symbols of surrender -- centuries **after** Assyria.

Notice how history is being collapsed! A supposedly Assyrian King is using Persian symbols!

**Assyrian Empire** (8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) > **Babylonian Empire** > **Persian Empire** > **Greek Empire** (4<sup>th</sup> cent.)

(Later in Judith we will see some Greek customs.)

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<sup>9</sup> Wills, “Judith,” *NIB*. 3. 1101.

Most commentators think Judith comes from **Hellenistic** (Greek) times.

**14-18, Preparations.** <sup>14</sup> So Holofernes left the presence of his master, and called together all the commanders, generals, and officers of the Assyrian army, <sup>15</sup> and mustered the picked troops by divisions as his lord had ordered him to do, one hundred and twenty thousand of them, together with twelve thousand archers on horseback, <sup>16</sup> and he organized them as a great army is marshaled for a campaign. <sup>17</sup> He collected a vast number of camels and asses and mules for transport, and innumerable sheep and oxen and goats for provision; <sup>18</sup> also plenty of food for every man, and a huge amount of gold and silver from the royal palace.

The portrait is of an invincible force.

**19-28, First Victories of Holofernes.** <sup>19</sup> So he set out with his whole army, to go ahead of King Nebuchadnezzar and to cover the whole face of the earth to the west with their chariots and horsemen and picked troops of infantry. <sup>20</sup> Along with them went a mixed crowd like a swarm of locusts, like the dust of the earth -- a multitude that could not be counted. <sup>21</sup> **They marched for three days** from Nineveh to the plain of Bectileth, and camped opposite Bectileth near the mountain which is to the north of Upper Cilicia. <sup>22</sup> From there Holofernes took his whole army, his infantry, cavalry, and chariots, and went up into the hill country <sup>23</sup> and ravaged Put and Lud, and plundered all the people of Rassis and the Ishmaelites who lived along the desert, south of the country of the Chelleans. <sup>24</sup> Then he followed the Euphrates and passed through Mesopotamia and destroyed all the hilltop cities along the brook Abron, as far as the sea. <sup>25</sup> He also seized the territory of Cilicia, and killed every one who resisted him, and came to the southern borders of Japheth, fronting toward **Arabia**. <sup>26</sup> He surrounded all the Midianites, and burned their tents and plundered their sheepfolds. <sup>27</sup> Then he went down into the plain of Damascus during the wheat harvest, and burned all their fields and destroyed their flocks and herds and sacked their cities and ravaged their lands and put to death all their young men with the edge of the sword. <sup>28</sup> So fear and terror of him fell upon all the people who lived along the seacoast, at **Sidon** and **Tyre**, and those who lived in **Sur** and **Ocina** and all who lived in **Jamnia**. Those who lived in **Azotus** and **Ascalon** feared him exceedingly.

**Terror as a Weapon.** It is a historical fact that the Assyrians used terror as a weapon. All war is cruel. The Assyrians seemed to delight in being excessively cruel.

#### V. 21, Three-Day March.

**2:21 A three-day march:** no ancient army could have traveled **three hundred miles** from Nineveh to Cilicia in three days.<sup>10</sup>

#### V. 25, Arabia.

The OT has no true geographical place name "Arabia," the collective noun *'ārāb* ("Arabs") being used to designate the region; the geographical term "Arabia" appears only in Greek texts [such as our book of Judith!]. Arabs are also sometimes referred to in the OT as *bēnē qedem* "people [literally "sons"] of the East. . . and their region as *'ereš qedem*, "land of the East," or simply *qedem*, "East" . . .<sup>11</sup>

This would not be Saudi Arabia; rather it is the area east of the Dead Sea (much of modern Jordan).

#### V. 28. Seven Cities.

**Tyre & Sidon**, to the north of Israel were ancient cities, but also mentioned in NT times.

I have no info on **Sur** and **Ocina**.

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<sup>10</sup> NABRE, note to Judith 2:21.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Houston Smith, "Arabia (Place)," *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 324.

**Jamnia** is on the Mediterranean.

After the destruction of the Temple by Rome in 70 A.D. it became an important center of Rabbinic Judaism. **Azotus and Ascalon** are further south on the shore. In Davidic times these were Philistine cities. The NABRE sees the mention of “seven” as symbolic of the complete terror the army inspired.<sup>12</sup>

## Week 56, Lecture 178. Judith, Chapter 3, The Nations Surrender to Holofernes

**Chapter 3, The Nations Begin to Surrender. 3:1** So they sent messengers to sue for peace, and said, <sup>2</sup> "Behold, we the servants of Nebuchadnezzar, the Great King, lie prostrate before you. Do with us whatever you will. <sup>3</sup> Behold, our buildings, and all our land, and all our wheat fields, and our flocks and herds, and all our sheepfolds with their tents, lie before you; do with them whatever you please. <sup>4</sup> Our cities also and their inhabitants are your slaves; come and deal with them in any way that seems good to you."

The author portrays a complete collapse of resistance -- an unconditional surrender.

**5-8, Response of Holofernes.** <sup>5</sup> The men came to Holofernes and told him all this. <sup>6</sup> Then he went down to the seacoast with his army and stationed garrisons in the hilltop cities and **took picked men from them as his allies.** <sup>7</sup> And these people and all in the country round about welcomed him with garlands and dances and tambourines. <sup>8</sup> And he **demolished all their shrines** and cut down their sacred groves; for it had been given to him to destroy all the gods of the land, so that all nations should **worship Nebuchadnezzar only**, and all their tongues and tribes should call upon him as god.

### V. 6, Holofernes “took picked men . . . as his allies.”

The army of Holofernes, which was already invincible, now becomes stronger by new recruits.

### V. 8 Demolish Shrines. Some Historical Background.

I have recently been reading Joseph Blenkinsopp’s commentary on Isaiah 56-66 (Anchor Bible series)<sup>13</sup>. The First Temple in Jerusalem was essentially a “chapel” for the Davidic kings.

It was not a place of prayer for most Israelites prior to the Babylonian Exile.

**597 B.C.** When Nebuchadnezzar first captured Jerusalem, he installed a puppet king, but did not destroy the Temple.

### Historical Background -- Destruction of Solomon’s Temple.

Jeremiah had counseled submission to the Babylonians.

The Temple priests, hoping for Egyptian help, encouraged the king to rebel.

They, backed by their prophets, promised that the LORD would defeat Babylon.

In **586 B.C.** the puppet king, Zedekiah, took their advice and rebelled

As punishment, the walls of Jerusalem were torn down, and the Temple burned.

The Temple was burned because it was a **center of political resistance.**

It was basically the personal chapel of a king who rebelled.

Davidic nationalism was a part of Temple piety. (We might study some psalms sometime)

It was **not** Assyrian or Babylonian policy to routinely destroy local temples and shrines.

### V. 8. . . Worship Nebuchadnezzar only.

Historically, polytheistic religions are tolerant of local cults, as long as the **state** gods are worshipped.

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<sup>12</sup> NABRE, note to Judith 2:28.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Isaiah 56-66 in its Historical Context,” *Isaiah 56–66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19B, Anchor Yale Bible (Yale Press, 2008) pages 42-54.

When Cyrus the Persian conquered the Babylonians, he promoted the restoration of temples. This was part of his policy of “keeping the local gods happy.”

**Jews were “strange” in the ancient world** -- they could worship only one God.

Therefore the Persians gave them an “arrangement.”

They would pray **only** to their own God, but they would pray **for** the emperor every day.

The Persians did not allow the Jews to have a king.

Eventually this led to religious **and political** authority being granted to the High Priest.

**NABRE Note.** (Plug for latest edition of the NABRE. <sup>14</sup> **NABRE** ≠ **NAB!**)

No Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, or Persian king is known to have claimed divinity. During Hellenistic times, Ptolemy V (203–181 B.C.) and the Seleucid Antiochus IV made claims to divinity. **In Dn 3 and 6, divinity is ascribed to Nebuchadnezzar and Darius, respectively.**<sup>15</sup>

**Comments on NABRE Note.** Daniel is written about 150 years before Jesus.

Notice that the claim to divinity appears to have been made **first** by the Seleucid kings.

These were successors to Alexander the Great, who died in 323 B.C.

We studied about the Seleucids when we read Daniel and 1 & 2 Maccabees.

The Book of Daniel **unhistorically** ascribes king-worship to Babylonian times.

The author of Judith apparently takes this [unhistorical claim] at face value.

This could be an indication that the author is familiar with Daniel, i.e., written **later** than Daniel.

Alternatively, the author could be drawing **independently** on the same pool of oral tradition as Daniel.

**9-10, Conclusion to Chapter 3.** <sup>9</sup> Then he came to the edge of **Esdraelon**, near **Dothan**, fronting the **great ridge of Judea**;

The coastal area of Israel is a plain. As you move east, inland, you begin to encounter hills, then mountains.

<sup>10</sup> here he camped between **Geba** and **Scythopolis**, and remained for a whole month in order to **assemble all the supplies for his army**.

**Dothan & Esdraelon.** Dothan first appears in the Joseph story (Gen 37:17).

When Joseph goes to look for his brothers, he cannot find them at Shechem.

A man tells him, “I heard them say they were going to Dothan.”

That’s the place where his brothers throw him into a pit, and eventually sell him into slavery.

Dothan is located in the fertile plain of Jezreel / Esdraelon.

This is in north-central Israel, a bit south of the Sea of Galilee.

**Plug for a Bible Atlas.** My favorite bible Atlas is *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, edited by Aharoni.<sup>16</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

Chapter 3 ends with an invincible army ready to invade Israel.

However, from the historical and geographical “errors” the readers know this is not going to be a simple “replay.”

How is this narrator, who has blended Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks going to tell this story?

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<sup>14</sup> *The Catholic Study Bible, 2nd Ed.: Notes*, 2nd edition, edited by Donald Senior, John J. Collins, and Mary Ann Getty (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> NABRE, note to Judith 3:8.

<sup>16</sup> Yohanan Aharoni, et. al., *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, Completely Revised Third Edition (1993) ISBN 0-02-500605-3.