

Week 57, Lecture 179.¹ Chapter 4, The Temple in Danger

Outline in NABRE ² [For reference -- no need to include this in the lecture]

- 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

Context.

Last week we looked at chapters 1-3, the growing Assyrian threat world-wide. This week we begin the story of the siege of Bethulia, the home town of Judith.

II. The Siege of Bethulia, Judith 4-7 ³

[Summarize] 4:1-5, Cites of Judea Stand Guard. 4:1 By this time the people of Israel living in Judea heard of everything that Holofernes, the general of Nebuchadnezzar the king of the Assyrians, had done to the nations, and how he had plundered and destroyed all their temples; ² they were therefore very greatly terrified at his approach before him (literally, “from his face”), and were alarmed both for Jerusalem and for the temple of the Lord their God. ³ For they had only recently returned from the captivity, and all the people of Judea were newly gathered together, and the sacred vessels and the altar and the temple had been consecrated after their profanation. ⁴ So they sent to every district of Samaria, and to Kona and Bethoron and Belmain and Jericho and to Choba and Aesora and the valley of Salem, ⁵ and immediately seized all the high hilltops and fortified the villages on them and stored up food in preparation for war -- since their fields had recently been harvested.

Summary. Unlike the other nations, the Jews do not surrender. They begin defensive preparations.

V. 2, Terrified “from his face” (= “before him”)

A Hebrew idiom -- one of several indications the book was probably composed in Hebrew.

A possible alternative would be the author is **deliberately imitating** “biblical style.”

I previously mentioned the “paratactic style” (and . . . and . . . and . . . and . . .)

[Summarize] 4:6-7, ⁶ And Joakim, the high priest, who was in Jerusalem at the time, wrote to the people of Bethulia and Betomesthaim, which faces Esdraelon opposite the plain near Dothan, ⁷ ordering them to seize the passes up into the hills, since by them Judea could be invaded, and it was easy to stop any who tried to enter, for the approach was narrow, only wide enough for two men at the most. ⁸ So the Israelites did as Joakim the high priest and the senate of the whole people of Israel, in session at Jerusalem, had given order.

Summary: The High Priest as Military Leader -- a trait of Maccabean & post-Maccabean (Hasmonean) times. The passage emphasizes his importance, as well as the importance of Jerusalem

4:9-15, The Israelites Respond in Prayer and Fasting. ⁹ And every man of Israel cried out to God with great fervor, and they humbled themselves with much fasting. ¹⁰ They and their wives and their children and their cattle and every resident alien and hired laborer and purchased slave -- they all

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

² 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.

³ The Major Sections designated by Roman numerals are adapted from the NABRE.

girded themselves with sackcloth. ¹¹ And all the men and women of Israel, and their children, **living at Jerusalem**, prostrated themselves before the temple and put ashes on their heads and spread out their sackcloth **before the face of the Lord**. ¹² They even surrounded the altar with sackcloth and cried out in unison, praying earnestly to the God of Israel not to give up their infants as prey and their wives as booty, and the cities they had inherited to be destroyed, and the sanctuary to be profaned and desecrated to the malicious joy of the Gentiles. ¹³ So **the Lord heard their prayers** and looked upon their affliction; for the people fasted many days throughout Judea and in Jerusalem before the sanctuary of the Lord Almighty **Ruler-of-all**. ¹⁴ And Joakim the high priest and all the priests who **stood before the Lord** and ministered to the Lord, with their loins girded with sackcloth, offered the continual burnt offerings and the vows and freewill offerings of the people. ¹⁵ With ashes upon their turbans, they cried out to the Lord with all their might to look with favor upon the whole house of Israel.

10. The penitential gestures involves the whole community.

Men, women, and children; servants, slaves, resident aliens; even the animals!

This resembles the fictional fast of Nineveh portrayed in the book of Jonah (3:5-8)

The hope is that God will change his mind.

⁹ Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we perish not?" ¹⁰ **When God saw** what they did, how they turned from their evil way, **God repented of the evil** which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it. (Jonah 3:9-10)

This is explicitly stated in Jonah. The same theology is **implicit** in the book of Judith.

God of Philosophers / God of Story-Tellers

The God of the philosophers knows every detail of the future ahead of time.

The God of the story-tellers **learns from experience**.

Whenever we say a **prayer of petition** (e.g., the Lord's Prayer) we are praying to the God of the story-tellers.

In the **next lecture** I will refer to the story of Job, the righteous man who suffers.

Here I will just point out: the God of Job has to **test** him. Why?

Because he **does not know in advance** how the "**test**" will turn out!

The same thought underlies the story of God's "**test**" of Abraham.

By the way, the Hebrew word *nasâ* "to test" also means "to tempt."

This is the image of God that underlies the petition in the Lord's Prayer: "Lead us not into temptation."

V. 11, "Before the face of the Lord"

Same Hebrew idiom as previously -- one of several indications the book was probably composed in Hebrew.

My point here: This shows that the prayer is **in the Temple in Jerusalem**.

Notice that the author is describing the behavior of the people **living at Jerusalem**.

He could not have written that the people of Bethulia prayed "before the face of the Lord."

"Real Presence" in the Temple. The Jews believed that God dwelt in heaven.

However he made his "**name**" dwell in the Temple.

This is analogous to our Catholic doctrine on the risen Christ.

He is seated (position of authority) or standing (intercessory position) at God's right hand.

Yet he is "really present" in the sacramental elements preserved in the tabernacle.

We Catholics show our reverence for this presence by genuflecting when we enter & leave church.

The main difference with the Jewish teaching -- we believe that Christ is "really present" in every Catholic Church.

By contrast, the Jewish belief was **localized in one place** -- the Jerusalem Temple.

It is hard for us Catholics to appreciate how this affected Jewish life & piety.

In Old-Testament times Jews believed that God was "really present" on earth as long as the Temple stood.

If the Temple is destroyed, God is no longer "really present."

13. The Lord heard their prayers. Reflections on Preaching.

Contrast Esther! In the Hebrew version of Esther, God is never mentioned.

In this story, God is explicitly named as a character who acts.

Many preachers spend most of their time telling people what they **should** or **should not** do.

I tell my preaching students: "It is not good to **should** on people."

The best preaching tells people what God is doing. It invites people to see life from a faith perspective.

Where is God in what is happening in politics?

Where is God in what is happening in the Church?

Where is God in what is happening in the lives of individuals?

13. "Ruler-of-All," Greek *Pantokratōr*

The Latin equivalent is *Omnipotens* (cf. English "omnipotent"). In Judith it occurs only 16:7 and 16:20.

This word is often translated "Almighty" (RSV, NRSV, NAB, NABRE, NJB).

That is not technically correct. One can be "Ruler of all" and still not be "Almighty."

In the Greek OT *pantokratōr* often translates "LORD or God of hosts -- i.e., of [heavenly] armies."

One can command large armies, and still not be "almighty" in the technical sense.

Those who wish to argue that God is "almighty" in the strict philosophical sense need better arguments than looking up "Almighty" in English Bibles.

The Question of Theodicy. (Is God Just?)

1) If God is indeed "almighty."

2) If God indeed is just and loving.

3) Bad things should not happen to God's people when they are good.

Rabbi Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.

He wrote the book when his son died of progeria, rapid aging.

His controversial solution: God is very powerful, but God is **not almighty**.

Sometimes even tragic situations are "the best that God can do."

I am not a systematic theologian.

I will simply point out that Kushner's view is not directly opposed to the Hebrew scriptures.

V. 15, Priests who "**Stood** Before the Lord."

Standing is the normal posture of prayer for the Jewish people.

It was also the normal posture of prayer for the earliest Christians.

Justin the apologist (second century A.D.) describes the "presider" as the *pro-hestōs* "the one who **stands** up front."

E.P. II, literally "We thank you for counting us worthy to **stand** in your presence and serve you."

I do not really care whether we pray in the ancient standing posture or the medieval kneeling position.

However, a **uniform** posture (priest & people) emphasizes the baptismal dignity of all.

A **diverse** posture (priest standing like ancient Jews; people kneeling like medieval serfs) supports clericalism -- in my humble opinion, the greatest evil in the Catholic Church.

Week 57, Lecture 180.⁴ Chapter 5, Holofernes & Achior.

Meanwhile, back at the Enemy Camp

We have heard of the Jewish preparations for war. The scene now shifts to the Assyrian camp.

⁴ Lectures numbered consecutively. This is this week's 1st lecture, but its number reflects its place in the **total** sequence.

[Summarize] 5:1-4, Holofernes Seeks Information. When Holofernes, the general of the Assyrian army, heard that the people of Israel had prepared for war and had closed the passes in the hills and fortified all the high hilltops and set up barricades in the plains, ² he was very angry. So he called together all the princes of Moab and the commanders of Ammon and all the governors of the coastland, ³ and said to them, "Tell me, you Canaanites, what people is this that lives in the hill country? What cities do they inhabit? How large is their army, and in what does their power or strength consist? Who **has risen up** over them as king, leading their army? ⁴ And why have they alone, of all who live in the west, refused to come out and meet me?"

Summary. Holofernes is outraged at the opposition.

He asks for information about the Israelites.

This gives the author a chance to insert a speech.

Remember: in ancient documents, speeches reflect **the editorial view of the author.**

But before we get to the speech, an aside.

V. 3. Who **has risen up over them as king?**

This is more literal than the RSV, "Who **rules** over them?"

The verb *anistēmi* is **one** of the NT words for "to rise [from the dead]."

The Greeks call the Church of the Holy Sepulcher the Church of the *Anastasis* (Resurrection)

When the NT speaks of the resurrection of Jesus, it is speaking of a **unique** event.

There was no theological "technical term" for what happened to him.

Language is based on experience. Nothing like what happened to Jesus has ever happened before.

The NT is using "**ordinary language**" to try to convey an "**ineffable mystery**."

I was struck by this word being used for **assuming kingly reign**. (It ordinarily means "stand up.")

NT Christians perceived Jesus as "exalted" to God's throne -- sharing his kingship.

This might have been a factor in their using this word for what happened to Jesus.

Achior's Speech, 5:5-21

Verse 5, Introduction. ⁵ Then Achior, the leader of all the Ammonites, said to him, "Let my lord now hear a word from the mouth of your servant, and I will tell you the truth about this people that dwells in the nearby mountain district. No falsehood shall come from your servant's mouth.

5:6-10, Earliest History. ⁶ This people is descended from the Chaldeans. ⁷ At one time they lived in Mesopotamia, because they would not follow the gods of their fathers who were in Chaldea. ⁸ And they left the ways of their ancestors, and they worshiped the God of heaven, the God they had come to know; and they drove them out from the presence of their gods; and they fled to Mesopotamia, and lived there for a long time. ⁹ And their God commanded them to leave the place where they were living and go to the land of Canaan. There they settled, and prospered, with much gold and silver and very many cattle. ¹⁰ And they went down to Egypt for a famine had spread over Canaan, and lived there as long as they had food; and there they became a great multitude -- so great that they could not be counted.

This passage deals with **Patriarchal / Matriarchal Times**

None of the patriarchs or matriarchs is mentioned by name. This is a 4-verse summary of Genesis 12-50

It covers the stories of Abraham and Sarah & Hagar; Isaac & Rebecca; Jacob, Leah & Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah.

It summarizes the story of Joseph, and how Israel went down to Egypt.

5:11-14, Oppression, Exodus, Sinai. ¹¹ And the king of Egypt became hostile to them; he took advantage of them and set them to making bricks, and humbled them and made slaves of them. ¹² And they cried out to their God, and he afflicted the whole land of Egypt with incurable plagues; and so the Egyptians **drove them out of their sight**. ¹³ And God dried up the Red Sea before them, ¹⁴

and he led them by the way of Sinai and Kadesh-barnea, and drove out all the people of the wilderness.

These four verses summarizes the Exodus experience.

These verses cover: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

The Passover celebration, celebrated by Jews to this day, commemorates these events.

The exodus is described mainly as an action of the Egyptians, who “**drove them out of their sight.**”

The author might be imagining what the Israelite story would look like to a pagan.

Notice that there is no mention of the Sinai covenant, or of the giving of the laws.

When you are summarizing four books in four verses, you have to leave out some details!

5:15-16, Life in the Wilderness, Conquest. ¹⁵ And they lived in the **land of the Amorites**, and by their might destroyed all the inhabitants of Heshbon; and crossing over the Jordan they took possession of all **the hill country**. ¹⁶ And **they drove out** before them the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Jebusites and the Shechemites and all the Gergesites, **and lived there a long time.**

Land of the Amorites

The author summarizes the events in the wilderness up to the death of Moses (Deuteronomy)

The defeat of the Amorite Sihon, King of Heshbon, is told in Numbers 19.

The hill country -- archaeologists recognize this as the Israelite heartland -- whatever their hypothesis.

Recall that many think the early Israelite community was a mixture of “invaders” taking uninhabited hill country -- and local slaves and dispossessed poor farmers who had fled from the rich land owners of the fertile plains.

“**They drove out**” summarizes the books of Joshua and Judges in one sentence!

“**Live there a long time**” includes not only Joshua & Judges, but also 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings.

5:17-19, Exile and Return. ¹⁷ As long as they did not sin against their God they prospered, for the God who hates iniquity is with them. ¹⁸ But when they departed from the way which he had appointed for them, they were utterly defeated in many battles and were led away captive to a foreign country; the temple of their God was razed to the ground, and their cities were captured by their enemies. ¹⁹ But now they have returned to their God, and have come back from the places to which they were scattered, and have occupied Jerusalem, where their sanctuary is, and have settled in the hill country, because it was uninhabited.

Deuteronomistic Theology. God rewards fidelity to the covenant; God punishes infidelity to the covenant.

This is **the main point** of the whole book of Deuteronomy -- which is portrayed as the “final sermon of Moses.”

The book of Deuteronomy gives its name to this theological thinking.

However it is also the main theme of: Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings.

In Jewish tradition these 6 books are known as **The Former Prophets.**

Contemporary biblical scholars call these same 6 books **The Deuteronomistic History**

-- because their “editorial position” is so similar to that of Deuteronomy.

Problems with Deuteronomistic Theology: Qoheleth / Ecclesiastes

Qoheleth (“The Preacher”) complains that the righteous are no better off than sinners.

But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; **whether it is love or hate man does not know.**[Comment] Everything before them is vanity, ² since **one fate comes to all** [frame opens],
to the righteous and the wicked,
to the good and the evil,
to the clean and the unclean,
to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice.
As is the good man, so is the sinner;

and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath.

³ This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that **one fate comes to all** [frame closes]; also the hearts of men are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. ⁴ But he who is joined with all the living has hope, **for a living dog is better than a dead lion.** [a proverb]

⁵ For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward; but the memory of them is lost. ⁶ Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and they have no more for ever any share in all that is done under the sun. (Eccl 9:1-6, RSV)

Like most of the OT, the book of Ecclesiastes has no hope for life after this one.

He is more depressed about this than are most of the other OT writers. One notable exception is Job.

Main point: Qoheleth does not accept Deuteronomistic Theology.

Problems with Deuteronomistic Theology: Job. The story of Job is the story of a righteous sufferer.

In 1:1 the “omniscient narrator tells us:”

that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil. (RSV)

The narrator twice puts these words into the mouth of God

“. . .there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil" (Job 1:8; 2:3 RSV)

God himself testifies that Job is righteous, without blame.

Thus the readers have information that no human character (Job & his wife, Job's 3 [or 4] “friends”) in the story has

The point of the story is that this absolutely innocent person suffers greatly.

Biblical Alternatives to Deuteronomistic Theology

1) Vicarious Suffering. In Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) there are poems about a righteous “Suffering Servant”

At times the Servant is identified with the people of Israel; at times with an individual

2) Apocalyptic Theology: The powers of evil govern this present age. God is going to change this **soon**.

This type of theology appears in some post-exilic prophecy, as well as in the Book of Daniel.

3) God helps those who help themselves. This is found in the Books of Maccabees.

Modern Analogy: one of Tom Lehrer's songs from the 1960's about nuclear proliferation

Egypt's gonna get one too -- just to use on “you know who”

So, Israel's getting tense; wants one in self defense

The Lord's our shepherd, says the psalm, But just in case -- we better get a bomb!⁵

A Thought Experiment

What would Israelite have been like if the Israelites had been faithful to the covenant?

Implications: What will Jewish life be like in the future if Jews are faithful to the covenant?

5:20-21, Achior's Conclusion. ²⁰ Now therefore, my master and lord, if there is any unwitting error in this people and they sin against their God and we find out their offense, then we will go up and defeat them. ²¹ But if there is no transgression in their nation, then let my lord pass them by; for their Lord will defend them, and their God will protect them, and we shall be put to shame before the whole world."

The summary expresses “Deuteronomistic Theology” in a few sentences.

⁵ Tom Lehrer, “Who's Next?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oRLON3ddZIw>

See also “MLF Lullaby” [= Multi-Lateral (nuclear) Force] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3j20voPS0gI>

5:22-24, Response of the Audience. ²² When Achior had finished saying this, all the men standing around the tent began to complain; Holofernes' officers and all the men from the seacoast and from Moab insisted that he must be put to death. ²³ "For," they said, "we will not be afraid of the Israelites; they are a people with no strength or power for making war. ²⁴ Therefore let us go up, Lord Holofernes, and they will be devoured by your vast army."

The Audience is Outraged.

This is a matter that will be decided by military force, not by whether the enemy has been faithful to their God or not. We will hear about the reaction of the "big boss," Holofernes, in the next chapter, chapter 6.