

## Week 58, Lecture 181.<sup>1</sup> Holofernes Turns Achior over to the Israelites; Judith Chapter 6

### 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 |

### Context.

Last week we looked at chapters 4-5, the Assyrians begin to move toward Bethulia, home town of Judith. Achior advised Holofernes to attack **only** if they could be sure the Israelites had sinned against their God. The leading officers were outraged at the suggestion the battle would not depend on military force. Chapter 6 begins with the response of General Holofernes to Achior.

**6:1-4, Holofernes Boasts of Assyrian Might.** When the disturbance made by the men outside the council died down, Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, said to Achior and all the Moabites in the presence of all **the foreign contingents**: <sup>2</sup> "And who are you, Achior, and you **hirelings of Ephraim**, to **prophecy** among us as you have done today and tell us not to make war against the people of Israel because their God will defend them? Who is God except Nebuchadnezzar? <sup>3</sup> He will send his forces and will destroy them from the face of the earth, and their God will not deliver them -- we the king's servants will destroy them as one man. They cannot resist the might of our cavalry. <sup>4</sup> We will burn them up, and their mountains will be drunk with their blood, and their fields will be full of their dead. They cannot withstand us, but will utterly perish. So says King Nebuchadnezzar, the lord of the whole earth. For he has spoken; none of his words shall be in vain.

### **The Foreign Contingents, *Allophuloi***

This word occurs hundreds of times in the Deuteronomistic History<sup>3</sup>, especially in Judges and 1-2 Samuel. Etymologically it means those "belonging to **other tribes**."

It could designate anyone not belonging to one of the 12 tribes of Israel.

But it almost always translates *P'lishitim*, the Hebrew word for "**Philistines**."

I cannot read it without thinking of the days of Saul and David -- I think the author was trying to evoke those times.

**Achior's Fate, 6:5-9.** <sup>5</sup> "But you, Achior, you **Ammonite** hireling, who have said these words on the day of your iniquity, you shall not see my face again from this day until I take revenge on this race that came out of Egypt. <sup>6</sup> Then the sword of my army and the spear of my servants shall pierce your sides, and you shall fall among their wounded, when I return. <sup>7</sup> Now my slaves are going to take you back into the hill country and put you in one of the cities beside the passes, <sup>8</sup> and you will not die until you perish along with them. <sup>9</sup> If you really hope in your heart that they will not be taken, do not look downcast! I have spoken and none of my words shall fail."

### **V. 5, You **Ammonite**. Deuteronomy on Ammonites:**

No **Ammonite** or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; even to the tenth generation **none belonging to them** shall enter the assembly of the LORD **forever**; <sup>4</sup> because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came forth out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. (Deut 23:3-4, RSV)

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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.

<sup>3</sup> 317 times in the OT, the majority of these in the Deuteronomistic History. It occurs only once in the NT, Acts 10:28, in the story of the conversion of Cornelius.

**The Question of Canonicity. Why is Judith not in the Jewish Tanak (Jewish Bible)?**

Later in this chapter Achior will be treated kindly by the Israelites.

Ultimately he will convert. Here the Book of Judith directly contradicts the Torah.

I wonder if this is one of the reasons why Judith was not accepted into the Torah.

**Wider Questions**

On a broader view: **living** religions adopt policies that in former times were **unthinkable**.

The study of scripture helps me to take a broader view on “old” questions and policies

e.g. the role of women in the Church;

our policy toward the divorced and the remarried, and other issues of sexual morality

some of our theological differences with the Reformers

And also of more recent controversies, e.g., the total condemnation of artificial birth control.

**[Summarize] Achior Is Banished to the Israelites, 6:10-13.** <sup>10</sup> Then Holofernes ordered his slaves, who waited on him in his tent, to seize Achior and take him to Bethulia and hand him over to the men of Israel. <sup>11</sup> So the slaves took him and led him out of the camp into the plain, and from the plain they went up into the hill country and came to the springs below Bethulia. <sup>12</sup> When the men of the city saw them, they caught up their weapons and ran out of the city to the top of the hill, and all the slingers kept them from coming up by casting stones at them. <sup>13</sup> However, they got under the shelter of the hill and they bound Achior and left him lying at the foot of the hill, and returned to their master.

**Summary of 6:10-13.** Holofernes orders his servants to take Achior to the Israelites.

As they approach Bethulia they are attacked by slingers. They tie Achior up, leave him there, and withdraw.

**[Summarize] Achior in Bethulia, 6:14-19.** <sup>14</sup> Then the men of **Israel** came down from their city and found him; and they untied him and brought him into Bethulia and placed him before the magistrates of their city, <sup>15</sup> who in those days were Uziah the son of Micah, of the tribe of Simeon, and Chabris the son of Gothoniel, and Charmis the son of Melchiel. <sup>16</sup> They called together all the elders of the city, and all their young men and their women ran to the assembly; and they set Achior in the midst of all their people, and Uziah asked him what had happened. <sup>17</sup> He answered and told them what had taken place at the council of Holofernes, and all that he had said in the presence of the Assyrian leaders, and all that Holofernes had said so boastfully against the house of Israel. <sup>18</sup> Then the people fell down and worshiped God, and cried out to him, and said, <sup>19</sup> "O Lord God of heaven, behold their arrogance, and have pity on the humiliation of our people, and look this day upon the faces of those who are consecrated to thee."

**Summary of 14-19.** Achior is brought into Bethulia. All the people assemble.

He tells them about his speech to Holofernes, how he was exiled because of it, and the plans of the enemy to attack.

**V. 19, The people respond with prayer.**

Notice how different this is from the Hebrew Book of Esther! (Later prayers were added by Greek scribes.)

**Achior Treated with Compassion, 6:20-21.** <sup>20</sup> Then they consoled Achior, and praised him greatly. <sup>21</sup> And Uziah took him from the assembly to his own house and gave a banquet for the elders; and all that night they called on the God of **Israel** for help.

**The Men of **Israel** (v. 14); The God of **Israel** (v. 21)**

The word “Israel” occurs 49 times in Judith. This includes the phrase “the sons of Israel” (19 times).<sup>4</sup>

The expression “the Jews” (RSV) or “the Judeans” (NETS) never occurs in Judith.

Contrast Greek Esther where the expression “the Jews /the Judeans” occurs 37 times.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The data on the word “Israel” comes from a search of the Greek word *Israēl*. The data on the phrase “sons of Israel” comes from the NETS translation. The phrase “the God of Israel” occurs 6 times in Judith, never in Esther.

Even though the books of Judith and Esther are from the same time period (late Persian / Hellenistic era) their linguistic usage is very different on this matter.

### **Judith and the 12 Tribes of Israel.**

The book of Judith appears to cling to the ancient ideal of the 12 tribes of Israel -- even though it has probably been at least 500 years since the 12 tribes existed when Judith was written! The 10 Northern tribes were forever scattered after they were conquered by the Assyrians (ca. 733 B.C.).

### **A New Testament Connection**

Since Judith was probably written about 100 B.C., this is useful information for understanding Jesus. His choice of “Twelve” members for his inner circle would have been a “parabolic gesture.” It would have been perceived as a sign that the long hoped for “Restoration of Israel” was at hand.

## **Week 58, Lecture 182. Bethulia under Siege; Judith Chapter 7.**

**7:1-3, Holofernes Encamps against Bethulia.** **7:1** The next day Holofernes ordered his whole army, and all the allies who had joined him, to break camp and move against Bethulia, and to seize the passes up into the hill country and make war on the Israelites. <sup>2</sup> So all their warriors moved their camp that day; their force of men of war was **one hundred and seventy thousand infantry** and twelve thousand cavalry, together with the baggage and the foot soldiers handling it, a very great multitude. <sup>3</sup> They encamped in the valley near Bethulia, beside the spring, and they spread out in breadth over Dothan as far as Balbaim and in length from Bethulia to Cyamon, which faces Esdraelon.

**170,00 Infantry.** The Vulgate (see the Douay and Knox translations) reports 120,000 infantry. I suspect this is not a scribal error or a translation mistake. Probably there were several versions of the story. Main point: The author emphasizes the magnitude of the force facing the Israelites.

**7:4-7, Preparations.** <sup>4</sup> When the Israelites saw their vast numbers **they were greatly alarmed**, and every one said to his neighbor, "These men will now lick up the face of the whole land; neither the high mountains nor the valleys nor the hills will bear their weight." <sup>5</sup> Then each man took up his weapons, and when they had kindled fires on their towers they remained on guard all that night. <sup>6</sup> On the second day Holofernes led out all his cavalry in full view of the Israelites in Bethulia, <sup>7</sup> and examined the approaches to the city, and **visited the springs that supplied their water, and seized them** and set guards of soldiers over them, and then returned to his army.

**Although alarmed, the Israelites respond bravely.**

RSV translates *etarachthēsan* by “**they were greatly terrified.**” NETS renders it “. . . greatly **alarmed.**”

The root meaning of the passive *tarassō* is “to be stirred up.”

The brave response makes “alarmed” the better translation.

Holofernes seizes [some of?] the water supplies.

**7:8-15, Israel's Traditional Enemies Speak to Holofernes.** <sup>8</sup> Then all the chieftains of the **people of Esau** and all the leaders of the Moabites and the commanders of the coastland came to him and said, <sup>9</sup> "Let our lord hear a word, lest his army be defeated. <sup>10</sup> For these people, the Israelites, **do not rely on their spears** but on the **height of the mountains** where they live, for it is not easy to reach the tops of their mountains. <sup>11</sup> Therefore, my lord, do not fight against them in battle array, and not a man of your army will fall. <sup>12</sup> Remain in your camp, and keep all the men in your forces with you; only let your servants **take possession of the spring of water** that flows

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<sup>5</sup> *BibleWorks* search on “the Judeans” in the NETS. Because the case endings change in Greek, when searching for a phrase it is much simpler to use a fairly literal English translation. Software can do it, but it takes longer to set up the search. If I ever want to publish this information in a professional journal, I will have to do the search “the hard way.”

from the foot of the mountain -- <sup>13</sup> for this is where all the people of Bethulia get their water. So thirst will destroy them, and they will give up their city. We and our people will go up to the tops of the nearby mountains and camp there to keep watch that not a man gets out of the city. <sup>14</sup> They and their wives and children will waste away with famine, and before the sword reaches them they will be strewn about in the streets where they live. <sup>15</sup> So you will pay them back with evil, because they rebelled and did not receive you peaceably."

### V. 8, The People of Esau<sup>6</sup>

Esau was the older brother of Jacob (Genesis 25-33). Jacob tricked him out of his birthright. Their conflicts foreshadowed later hostilities during the time of the Davidic kings. Closer to the time Judith was written John Hyrcanus, successor to the Maccabees, had conquered Idumea. By this time Edom was called Idumea. But the author of Judith uses the ancient name "Esau." John Hyrcanus forcibly converted the Idumeans, and had all the males circumcised.

This recent hostility would have been fresh in the mind of the original readers of Judith. By the time of Jesus, the Idumean Herod will be "King of the Jews."

**V. 10, Spears, Height of the Mountains. Some History.** Contemporary scholarship on "The Conquest." Historically, Israel is analogous to Switzerland, whose high mountains serve as a natural defense. When the earliest Israelites arrived from Egypt there was probably not a wholesale conquest of Canaan (Joshua).

The more gradual process described in the book of Judges is far more historically likely. They earliest Israelites settled in the uninhabited (less fertile, harder to farm) hill country. There they were joined by runaway slaves and oppressed peasants -- inspired by their story of a liberating God. Militarily the early Israelites were no match for the horses and chariots of the Canaanites on the flat land. An early exception (Song of Deborah, Judges 5) records a flash flood that rendered the chariots of Sisera useless. The first large-scale successes against the "flat-landers" took place only after Israel had kings: Saul, then David. Israel was never a "first class power."

Historically, "Solomon in all his glory" was possible only because Egypt and Mesopotamia were in decline.

### V. 12, Take Possession of the Spring of Water

The problem is that verse 7 states that Holofernes had already seized the springs of water! Did he miss one? Or is this a later editorial addition -- designed to stir up ancient hatreds? If so, whoever added it, forgot to take the phrase "and seized them" from verse 7. Without that one little phrase, there would be no problem in the "story line" of this unhistorical story.

**[Summarize] 7:16-18, The Response of Holofernes.** <sup>16</sup> These words pleased Holofernes and all his servants, and he gave orders to do as they had said. <sup>17</sup> So the army of the Ammonites moved forward, together with five thousand Assyrians, and they encamped in the valley and seized the water supply and the springs of the Israelites. <sup>18</sup> And the sons of Esau and the sons of Ammon went up and encamped in the hill country opposite Dothan; and they sent some of their men toward the south and the east, toward Egrebel, which is near Chusi beside the brook Mochmur. The rest of the Assyrian army encamped in the plain, and covered the whole face of the land, and their tents and supply trains spread out in great number, and they formed a vast multitude.

**Summary of 7:16-18.** Holofernes agrees to the plan.

### Geography, and Some History.

The two enemies singled out for mention here are the sons of Esau (Edom) and the sons of Ammon.

Earlier (5:2,22; 6:1; 7:8) the Moabites were also mentioned.

On the east side of the Jordan the Ammonites were the furthest north.

South of them were the Moabites, beside the Dead Sea.

South of the Dead Sea was Edom (Idumea).

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<sup>6</sup> For more information, see L. W. Wills, "Judith," *New Interpreter's Bible*, 3. 1127.

These areas, conquered by King David, rejoiced when the Babylonians overthrew the Davidic monarchy. When the Maccabees and their successors reconquered some of this territory, they considered it “payback.”

**[Summarize] 7:19-22, Inside Bethulia: The Agony of the Siege.** <sup>19</sup> The people of Israel cried out to the Lord their God, for **their courage failed**, because all their enemies had surrounded them and there was no way of escape from them. <sup>20</sup> The whole Assyrian army, their infantry, chariots, and cavalry, surrounded them for thirty-four days, until all the vessels of water belonging to every inhabitant of Bethulia were empty; <sup>21</sup> their cisterns were going dry, and they did not have enough water to drink their fill for a single day, because it was measured out to them to drink. <sup>22</sup> Their children lost heart, and the women and young men fainted from thirst and fell down in the streets of the city and in the passages through the gates; there was no strength left in them any longer.

**Summary of 19-22.** The siege tactics are working. Prolonged thirst is undermining their original courage and resolve.

**7:23-29, The People Complain vs. Their Leaders.** <sup>23</sup> Then all the people, the young men, the women, and the children, gathered about Uziah and the rulers of the city and cried out with a loud voice, and said before all the elders, <sup>24</sup> “God be judge between you and us! For **you have done us a great injury in not making peace** with the Assyrians. <sup>25</sup> For now we have no one to help us; **God has sold us into their hands**, to strew us on the ground before them with thirst and utter destruction. <sup>26</sup> Now call them in and **surrender the whole city** to the army of Holofernes and to all his forces, to be plundered. <sup>27</sup> For it would be better for us to be captured by them; for we will be slaves, but our lives will be spared, and we shall not witness the death of our babes before our eyes, or see our wives and children draw their last breath. <sup>28</sup> We call to witness against you heaven and earth and our God, the Lord of our fathers, **who punishes us according to our sins and the sins of our ancestors**. Let him not do this day the things which we have described!” <sup>29</sup> Then great and general lamentation arose throughout the assembly, and they cried out to the Lord God with a loud voice.

#### **The People Turn against their Leaders.**

V. 24. They complain against the leaders for **not making peace** with the Assyrians.

V. 26. They demand that the leaders **surrender the whole city**.

#### **V. 28, Deuteronomistic Theology.**

The people interpret the military disaster according to Deuteronomistic theology.

They are being punished either for: 1) **their own sins**; 2) **the sins of their ancestors**.

See also verse 25, “**God has sold us into their hands**.”

#### **Remarks on Deuteronomistic Theology.**

Over-simplified (God rewards good; punishes evil) it is inadequate. In spite of this, it contains great insights.

Look at the U.S.A. today, and see how the “sins of our ancestors” (e.g., slavery) still affect us.

Look at how often children suffer from their parents use of drugs or other crimes.

We moderns tend to explain these things in terms of **impersonal** psychological or sociological forces.

The ancient Jews thought more in terms of an angry **personal** response of their God.

#### **Quote from John L. McKenzie** (written not too long after World War II and Korea)

Now, the response of the prophets to the threat of Assyria is not the same in all details in each one of the prophets, and these variations in their thinking will give us some trouble. But there is one fundamental truth which each one of them proposes, and it is such a startling truth that we cannot afford to risk slighting it. I say it is a startling truth, although it has circulated for so long in the world which reads the Bible that it has lost much of its original pungency. **Or shall we say that we look upon it as we look upon so much of the biblical revelation, as something which had its place in its own time, but has lost its urgency because the world has moved so far?** This fundamental truth is simply stated by Isaiah. **Assyria is the rod of the Lord's anger, the staff of His indignation**. This is the basic prophetic utterance upon international relations which has been conventionalized into insignificance. It has been conventionalized because the modern world, even the modern Christian and Catholic world, is slow to confess that the principle has any validity for our day. It should not be difficult for

us to put ourselves in the place of the ancient Hebrews and to enter fully into their mind, **for the words they uttered in response to the prophets are familiar, and we have heard the like of them in our own day:** It is not the Lord, it is not He. It is someone else who brings this evil upon us, but not the Lord whom we worship and serve. It is not the bitter fruit of our evil deeds that we taste, not the breath of His hot anger that we sense. It must be a **breakdown of diplomacy, a failure of strategy, a collapse of the military machine; but it is not the Lord.** If wicked and godless men afflict the righteous, it cannot be the paralyzing stroke of His right hand . . . The Hebrews would gladly admit the prophetic principle if it were applied to another people, and they could appreciate the poems of Nahum which hymned the fall of Nineveh. But the Lord could not let this happen to them. **National guilt . . . is a terrifying idea; and its terror is magnified because it is accompanied by national blindness.** <sup>7</sup>

**7:30-32, Uzziah Responds to the People.** <sup>30</sup> And Uzziah said to them, "Have courage, my brothers! Let us hold out for five more days; by that time the Lord our God will restore to us his mercy, for he will not forsake us utterly. <sup>31</sup> But if these days pass by, and no help comes for us, I will do what you say." <sup>32</sup> Then he dismissed the people to their various posts, and they went up on the walls and towers of their city. The women and children he sent home. And they were greatly depressed in the city.

### **The Response of Uzziah.**

Basically he agrees to the demand of the people.

He asks for a five-day delay.

In this part of the world, rain is "seasonal." A rain to fill their cisterns would have to be a miracle.

The stage is now set for the arrival of our heroine Judith, who will appear in the next chapter.

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<sup>7</sup> John L. McKenzie, *The Two Edged Sword: An Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1956) 175-76.