

## Week 59, Lecture 183.<sup>1</sup> Judith Comes On Stage, Judith 8:1-11.

### Outline in NABRE<sup>2</sup> [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 6 & 7.

Back in chapter 5 Achior had suggested that Israel could not be conquered unless they had sinned against their God. In chapter 6 Holofernes expresses his outrage, and he boasts of Assyrian might.

He has Achior bound and delivered to the Israelites, promising that Achior he would die when Israel was conquered. In chapter 7 the Assyrians begin the siege of Bethulia, the home town of Judith.

At the suggestion of Israel's traditional enemies (Ammon, Moab, Edom) they cut off the water supply.

Thirst drains the courage of the people. After a month, the people demand that their leaders surrender.

Uzziah promises that if God does not send (miraculous) rain within five days, he will surrender.

### The Heroine Appears.

Various outlines of Judith a possible. In the notes I have given the 5-part outline of the NABRE for reference.

The simplest outline of Judith divides the book into two major parts.<sup>3</sup>

- I. Nebuchadnezzar Threatens the West & Israel chapters 1-7
- II. Judith Arises to Rescue Her People chapters 8-16

**Three Lectures on Chapter 8.** I could summarize much of chapter 8, and fit it all into one (long) lecture.

However, I have decided to devote three (relatively short) lectures to this chapter. My reasons:

- 1) This is the introduction of our heroine. Introductions are important. I want to examine the details.
- 2) This chapter gives her introductory speech.

In ancient documents speeches of major characters often express the editorial opinion of the author.

## PART TWO: THE HEROINE RESPONDS, Judith 8-16

### III. Judith, Instrument of the Lord, Judith 8-9<sup>4</sup>

#### 8:1-8, Background of Judith.

**8:1, Genealogy.** At that time Judith heard about these things: she was the daughter of Merari the son of Ox, son of Joseph, son of Oziel, son of Eliah, son of Ananias, son of Gideon, son of Raphain, son of Ahitub, son of Elijah, son of Hilkiyah, son of Eliab, son of Nathanael, son of Salamiel, son of Sarasadai, son of Israel.

**Remarks on the Genealogy.** This is the longest genealogy of a woman anywhere in the Bible.

Contrary to the expectations of popular piety the NT gives **no** genealogical information about Mary, mother of Jesus.

The names of Mary's parents, "Joachim and Anna" come from the legendary 2<sup>nd</sup> century Infancy Gospel of James

This Gospel was allegedly written by the older step-brother of Jesus, Joseph's child from a former marriage.

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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> Lawrence M. Wills ("The Book of Judith: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," *New Interpreter's Bible* [Abingdon, 1999] Volume 3, page1075) proposes such a two-part outline.

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

Back to Judith.

### Connection to Tribe of Simeon

**Israel** is mentioned – but none of his descendants born during the centuries they lived in Egypt!

In her prayer in 9:2 Judith will claim **Simeon** as her ancestor, but he is **not** mentioned here.

The first **named** descendants date to the time of the Exodus. So there is a **gap of several centuries** in this genealogy!

**Sarasadai and Salamiel.** These are the two most ancient ancestors mentioned after Israel.

They are mentioned in the book of Numbers; hence they would belong to the “Exodus” generation.

**Sarasadai.** The spelling is unique. **Sourisadai** is mentioned 5 times in Numbers (1:6; 2:12; 7:36,41; 10:19).

His son **Salamiel** is mentioned in Numbers as a member of the tribe of Simeon (same verses, plus 34:20).<sup>5</sup>

The “Simeon connection” would be important.

It would remind readers of how Simeon and Levi too revenge on their enemies. More about that in chapter 9.

**8:2-8, Judith as a Widow.** <sup>2</sup> Her husband Manasseh, who belonged to her tribe and family, had died during the barley harvest. <sup>3</sup> For as he stood overseeing the men who were binding sheaves in the field, he was overcome by the burning heat, and took to his bed and died in Bethulia his city. So they buried him with his fathers in the field between Dothan and Balamon. <sup>4</sup> Judith had lived at home as a widow for three years and four months. <sup>5</sup> She set up a **tent for herself on the roof** of her house, and girded sackcloth about her loins and wore the **garments of her widowhood**. <sup>6</sup> She **fasted all the days of her widowhood, except** the day before the sabbath and the **sabbath** itself, the day before the new moon and the day of the new moon, and the **feasts** and days of rejoicing of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> She was beautiful in appearance, and had a very lovely face; and her husband Manasseh had left her **gold and silver, and men and women slaves, and cattle, and fields; and she maintained this estate**. <sup>8</sup> No one spoke ill of her, for she feared God with great devotion.

**Judith is portrayed as a Wealthy Widow.** Her husband has left her a **large estate** (v. 7).

V. 4, She lives in a **tent on the roof** of her house-- not in the luxurious accommodations of her own home.

She continues to wear **widow's clothing**, rather than the beautiful clothing she wore when her husband lived.

V. 6, She **fasts “all the days of her widowhood.”** Her life is a life of penance.

She does **not fast** on **sabbaths and festivals**. This would be like excommunicating herself from her people.

How could she fast on a day of national rejoicing, and remain a loyal Israelite?

Her spirituality is strongly communal.

**8:9-11a, Judith Responds to the Crisis.** <sup>9</sup> When Judith heard the wicked words spoken by the people against the ruler, because they were faint for lack of water, and when she heard all that Uzziah said to them, and how he promised them under oath to surrender the city to the Assyrians after five days, <sup>10</sup> she sent **her maid**, who was in charge of all she possessed, to **summon** [Uzziah]<sup>6</sup> Chabris and Charmis, the elders of her city. <sup>11</sup> They came to her, and she said to them,

### Contrast Modern Thought!

I, for one, would react with compassion to people who surrendered after over a month of thirst.

I'm not sure if I myself would have been able to hold out as long as they did.

This is **not** the reaction of Judith. This lady is tough!

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<sup>5</sup> I did not have time to check out the whole genealogy, but there appear to be historical problems. For instance, the only **Nathanael** mentioned in Numbers is from the tribe of **Issachar** (1:8; 2:5; 7:18, 23; 10:15), not Simeon! Similarly **Oziel** (Num 3:19; 3:30) appears to be from the tribe of **Levi**.

<sup>6</sup> The Greek text I was using did not have the name “Uzziah.” However many manuscripts **do** contain the name, and many translations do include it. After checking manuscripts and editions, I decided to **add Uzziah** to my translation, which is basically a modification of the RSV.

**V, 10. Judith's Maid.** This faithful servant will accompany Judith on her adventures. We never learn her name. Judith's **last recorded action** is to give this slave her freedom. She is anonymous. In Judith's name, she **summons** the (male) leaders of the city, and they respond to her summons. Judith is about to give them a piece of her mind! That is the subject of the next lecture.

### Week 59, Lecture 184. Judith's Speech to the City Elders, Judith 8:11-27.

**Context.** Judith has heard the people have demanded that Bethulia be surrendered. She has summoned the elders of the city, and they have arrived. Recall that in ancient writings many speeches express the **editorial opinion of the author**.

#### 8:11b-27, Judith's Speech to the City Elders.

**8:11b-13, Opening. Do not test God!** "Listen to me, rulers of the people of Bethulia! What you have said to the people today is not right; you have even sworn and pronounced this oath between God and you, promising to surrender the city to our enemies unless the Lord turns and helps us within so many days.<sup>12</sup> Who are you, who have **tested God** this day, and are setting yourselves up in the place of God among the children of humanity?<sup>13</sup> You are **questioning** the Lord Almighty -- but **you will never understand anything at all!**"

**Testing God.** In biblical thought, it is okay for God to test human beings. After all, he's God! However, it is wicked for human beings to test God. In the Q version (Matt 4:7 || Luke 4:12) of the Temptation Story this is one of the tests/temptations of Jesus. The devil suggests he throw himself down from the top of the Temple to see if God will save him. Jesus responds by quoting Deut 6:16 "You shall not put the LORD your God to the test." Judith accuses the leaders of testing God because they have set a 5-day limit for God to act.

#### Testing and Questioning

Some translations (RSV, NRSV, NABRE, NJB) translate v. 12 and v. 13 the same way, using "test" both times. V. 12 has the tradition verb for "test / tempt" (*peirazō*). In v. 13 the idea is "questioning," as examining a witness. The ideas are parallel, but with a different nuance.

Judith follows these insights with **An Insult:** "**You will never understand anything at all!**" She then proceeds to expound on: The limitations of human knowledge

**8:14, Human ignorance.**<sup>14</sup> You cannot plumb the depths of the human heart, nor find out what a person is thinking; how do you expect to search out God, who made all these things, and find out his mind or comprehend his thought? No, my brethren, do not provoke the Lord our God to anger.

She concludes with a warning: Don't make God angry!

**8:15-17, We cannot control God.**<sup>15</sup> For if he does not choose to help us within these five days, he has power to **protect us** within any time he pleases, or even to **destroy us** in the presence of our enemies.<sup>16</sup> **Do not try to bind the purposes of the Lord** our God; for **God is not like a human**, to be threatened, **nor like a person**, to be won over by pleading.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, while we wait for his deliverance, let us call upon him to help us, and he will hear our voice, **if it pleases him**.

#### An Advance over Deuteronomistic Theology

At least in its simplified form Deuteronomistic thought suggests we can control God. If we are good, God will bless us; if we are bad God will punish us -- so be good and God will have to bless us!

Judith stresses God's power: he can **protect** or he can **destroy**.

But our behavior cannot control God, cannot "**bind the purposes of the Lord.**"

God is ultimately mysterious and unknowable. **God is not like human beings!** Threats & pleading are both useless.

We can **hope** he will save us if we are faithful, **but we cannot be certain.** God will save us **if it pleases him.**

It is sinful to give up hope. Perhaps God will save us; perhaps not. We have to accept whatever God wills for us.

"*Oh God, your will is hard; but You hold every card*" (*Superstar*, from the Agony in the Garden scene)

**Reason for Hope.** <sup>18</sup> "For never in our generation, nor in these present days, has there been any tribe or family or people or city of ours which worshiped gods made with hands, as was done in days gone by -- <sup>19</sup> and that was why our fathers were handed over to the sword, and to be plundered, and so they suffered a great catastrophe before our enemies. <sup>20</sup> But we know no other god but him, and therefore we **hope** that he will not disdain us or any of our nation.

**Here Judith's thought is strongly Deuteronomistic.**

The worship of false gods was the main reason for punishment in the past.

They have not committed **this** sin in her days. Therefore there is reason to hope.

The book of Judith is a "thought experiment" -- What if God's people were faithful to him?

But again, we have **hope**, rather than **certainty**.

**Reason for Bravery.** <sup>21</sup> For if we are captured **all Judea** will be captured and our **sanctuary** will be plundered; and he will **exact the penalty** for its desecration from our blood. <sup>22</sup> And the slaughter of our brethren and the captivity of the land and the desolation of our inheritance -- all this **he will bring upon our heads** among the Gentiles, wherever we serve as slaves; and we shall be an offense and a reproach in the eyes of those who acquire us. <sup>23</sup> For our slavery will not bring us into favor, but the Lord our **God will turn it to dishonor.**

**What is at stake** is not simply their lives and their town of Bethulia.

**All Judea** will fall; the **sanctuary** will be desecrated.

Because this will result from their cowardice, God will **exact more punishment** in the future.

Surrender will not end the torment. Things will get worse. God will personally make sure of that!

This tough woman believes in a tough God!

**Final Exhortation.** <sup>24</sup> "Now therefore, brethren, let **us** set an example to our brethren, for their lives depend upon **us**, and the sanctuary and the temple and the altar rest upon **us**. <sup>25</sup> In spite of everything let **us** give thanks to the Lord our God, who is **testing us** as he did our ancestors. <sup>26</sup> Remember what he did with Abraham, and how he **tested** Isaac, and what happened to Jacob in Mesopotamia in Syria, while he was keeping the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother. <sup>27</sup> For he has not tried **us** with fire, as he did them, to search their hearts, nor has he taken revenge upon **us**; but the Lord scourges those who draw near to him, in order to admonish them."

**Us.** I have highlighted this word here. It also occurs in Uzziah's response. I will comment on it in the next lecture.

**Testing and Tempting.** I have heard people say: God "tests" us, but Satan "tempts" us.

This is a distinction without a difference in Greek or in Hebrew.

The Greek verb *peirazō* means both "to test" and "to tempt."

The Greek noun *peirasmos* can mean either "test" or "temptation"<sup>7</sup>

Lead us not into **temptation** (Matt 6:13, KJV, Douay, RSV)

Do not subject us to the final **test** (Matt 6:13, NAB) Do not put us to the **test** (NJB)

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<sup>7</sup> Hebrew equivalents would be *nissâ* (to test, tempt) & *nissayôn* (test, temptation). The noun does not appear in the Hebrew OT, but the verb occurs 36 times. Perhaps the most famous example is the first one: "God **tested (tempted)** Abraham" (Gen 22:1).

**The Lord's Prayer and Judith.** The people of Bethulia have decided that the test is too hard. They cannot do it. Judith's position seems to be: "No test is too hard; no temptation is too difficult. Basically Jesus encourages his disciples to pray that God does **not** give them a test like the one he gave Abraham! Judith's "muscular piety" encourages people to **thank God**, no matter how difficult the test. Maybe I'm a wimp, but I'm with Jesus on this one! Final note: Our Catholic Bible includes **both** positions!<sup>8</sup>

### Week 59, Lecture 185. Judith & Uzziah Dialogue, Judith 8:28-36.

**Context.** Judith has finished her introductory speech. We now get the response of **Uzziah**. We met him in chapter 6. He is the first of three city magistrates named in 6:14-15. He is the one who led the questioning of Achior when he was brought into the city (6:16). After Achior gave his testimony, Uzziah had a banquet for him at his own house (6:21). When the people are crushed by thirst, he is the only **named** leader to whom they complain (7:23). Uzziah is the one who makes the decision that they will wait five days before surrendering (7:30). From this, it seems that our author wants us to consider Uzziah as the **chief magistrate /mayor** of Bethulia.

**8:28-31, Uzziah Replies to Judith.** <sup>28</sup> Then Uzziah said to her, "All that you have said has been spoken **with a brave heart**, and there is no one who will deny your words. <sup>29</sup> Today is not the first time your wisdom has been shown, but from the beginning of your days all the people have recognized your understanding, for **your heart's disposition is right**. <sup>30</sup> **But** the people were very thirsty, and they compelled **us** to do for them what we have promised, and made **us** take an oath which we cannot break. <sup>31</sup> So pray for **us**, since you are a devout woman, and the Lord will send us rain to fill our cisterns and we will no longer be faint."

#### NABRE note to Judith 8:24

When Judith uses the word "**us**" she is including herself, along with Uzziah and the other leaders.

When Uzziah responds he will also use the word "**us**," but he will not be including Judith!

My question: What does this say about their respective visions of leadership?

**Uzziah's Response** has three parts.

1) He begins by praising Judith. 2) He speaks of the current situation. 3) He asks for prayer.

#### V. 28, Praise of Judith

He acknowledges she has spoken **with a brave heart**. The heart is the **organ of thought** in Hebrew.

The Greek word **agathos** can have many translations.

with a **true** heart (NETS, RSV, NRSV); with a **good** heart (Brenton, KJV apocrypha);

from a **genuine** heart (Common English Bible); with an **honest** heart (NJB)

with **good sense** (NAB); **truthfully** (NABRE)

My translation -- **brave** -- gives an ancient, Homeric meaning -- which I think fits the context.

#### V. 29, More Praise of Judith

**Your heart's disposition is right (RSV).** Literally, "the **plasma** of your heart is good."

This could be rendered "the **formation** of your heart is good." I.e., You have had a good upbringing.

NETS renders it "**what is shaped** by your heart is good."

This would stress the good things that **come from** her heart, rather than the good upbringing that went into forming it.

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<sup>8</sup> Protestants, without the book of Judith, will find similar sentiments in Hebrews 11 and 12.

Whatever the precise nuance, Uzziah's point is that her disposition / good ideas did not begin "today."  
Her opinions have been respected for a long time.

### V. 30. "But" -- The Current Situation.

When I was taking Clinical Pastoral Education, one of the main goals of the program was to build "listening skills." Our supervisor told us: **Always pay special attention to whatever comes after "BUT."** The point he is making is that no matter how good and wise the advice of Judith is, he cannot take it. For better or for worse, he is bound by an oath that he cannot break.

**V. 31, Request for Prayer.** Uzziah judges the best thing this holy woman can do is to pray for God to work a miracle. The specific miracle he is thinking of is God sending enough rain to fill the cisterns. Then they will be able to hold out longer. Maybe God will hear her prayer when he will not hear the prayers of others.

**8:32-36. Judith's Final Response.** <sup>32</sup> Judith said to them, "**Listen to me.** I am about to do a thing which will go down through all generations of our descendants. <sup>33</sup> **Stand at the city gate tonight, and I will go out with my maid;** and within the days after which you have promised to surrender the city to our enemies, **the Lord will deliver Israel by my hand.** <sup>34</sup> As for you, **do not investigate my plan; for I will not tell you** until I have finished **what I am about to do.**" <sup>35</sup> Uzziah and the rulers said to her, "Go in peace, and [may] the Lord God go before you, to take revenge upon our enemies." <sup>36</sup> So they returned from the tent and went to their posts.

### Judith Takes Charge of the Situation.

She starts giving orders: **Listen** to me. **Stand** at the city gate. **Do not investigate** my plan. She tells the leaders of the city what she will do, and what she will not do.

**I will go out with my maid . . .**

**I will not tell you . . . what I am about to do.**

She makes a promise: **The Lord will deliver Israel by my hand.**

The elders of the patriarchal society agree to follow her instructions. What do they have to lose?

**Judith first order is a demand that they "listen" to her.** "Request" would not be strong enough.

Her command could also be translated "**Hear** me."

It is the same verb that begins the prayer Jews say daily "**Hear**, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one."

She makes it clear she is going to do more than pray. She is going to act.

**Prayer and Action.** Uzziah had requested that this holy woman pray.

How would the story have ended if Judith had acceded to this pious suggestion?

Judith will do some praying before the story is over, but she will do a lot more than that!

The pagan Romans had a proverb: "The goddess Fortune favors the brave."<sup>9</sup>

Judith seems to have a similar theology for the God of Israel. She is counting on God, but she is going to do her part!

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<sup>9</sup> *Fortes Fortuna juvat.* Another version: "The goddess Fortune fears the brave, but she crushes cowards." *Fortuna fortes metuit, ignavos premit.*