

Week 62, Lecture 190.¹ The Victory of Judith, Chapter 13.

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	we finish this section.
V.	Victory and Thanksgiving (14:1–16:25)	chapters 14-16	we begin this section.

Context. In chapter 11 Judith and Holofernes meet for the first time.

He is stunned by her beauty, and totally clueless concerning the double-meanings of her words.

In chapter 12 we learn of Judith's daily routine.

She tells Holofernes God will reveal to her when the Israelites have sinned, and his victory is certain.

Every evening she goes outside the camp to pray (supposedly for "revelation") and to bathe.

In the final scene of chapter 12, she is eating her pure food at a banquet to which Holofernes has invited her.

He is planning to seduce her; she is "playing along," and he has become falling-down drunk.

13:1-10, Judith Kills Holofernes. (I have divided this "act" into several "scenes")

1-4a, Preparations. **13:1** When evening came, his slaves quickly withdrew, and Bagoas closed the tent from outside and shut out the attendants from his master's presence; and they went to bed, for they all were weary because the banquet had lasted long. ² So Judith was left alone in the tent, with Holofernes stretched out on his bed, for he was **dead drunk**. ³ Now Judith had told her maid to **stand outside** the bedchamber and to wait for her **departure**, as she did every day; for she said she would be going out for her prayers. And she had said the same thing to Bagoas. ⁴ So everyone went out, and no one, either small or great, was left in the bedchamber.

Dead Drunk (NRSV)

RSV "overcome with wine." Literally "wine" is the subject of the sentence.

PJM. "For the wine had overcome him." More literally "For the wine was flowing all around inside him."

The Maid is to Stand Outside

Later artists have taken "artistic license" with the scene. The maid is often pictured standing beside Judith.

What is the penalty for taking artistic license with a non-historical scene?

Her "Departure." Literally, her *exodus*

Is this a reference to God's greatest victory **ever**, as far as Jews are concerned?

4b-8, The Climactic Scene.

1) Judith's First Prayer (4b-5)

Address to God

Petition

Supporting Reasons

Then Judith, standing beside his bed, said in her heart, "**O Lord God of all might, look in this hour upon the work of my hands for the exaltation of Jerusalem.**" ⁵ For now is the time to help your

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.

inheritance, and to carry out my undertaking for the destruction of the enemies who have risen up against us."

For the exaltation of Jerusalem.

Judith stresses that her actions are for the glory of God's city; i.e., ultimately for God's glory.

2) Her Approach (6-7a)

⁶ She went up to the post at the end of the bed, above Holofernes' head, and took down his **sword** that hung there. ⁷ She came close to his bed and took hold of the hair of his head, and said,

Sword, *akinakēs*. This is not the normal word for "sword" in biblical Greek, *machaira*.

Rather it is a loan-word from the Persian language. According to LSJ³ it refers to a "short straight sword."

Jerome renders it by *pugio*, "dagger;" According to Cicero, this was the weapon Brutus used against Julius Caesar.⁴ NETS "scimitar."

3) Second Brief Prayer (7b)

"Give me strength this day, O Lord God of Israel!"

Here the **petition** preceded the **address**.

4) The Slaughter (8)

⁸ And she struck his neck **twice** with all her might, and severed it from his body.

The picture I have: she is holding his head by the hair with one hand; she is swinging the sword with the other. She has to strike his neck twice. Why? I think the point is that she is not used to using a sword.

9-10, The Get-Away. ⁹ Then she tumbled his body off the bed and pulled down the canopy from the posts; after a moment she went out, and gave Holofernes' head to her maid, ¹⁰ who placed it in her bag of foods. Then the two of them went out together, as they were accustomed to go for prayer; and they passed through the camp and circled around the valley and went up the mountain to Bethulia and came to its gates.

The action is moving fast. In just a couple of verses, she has moved from the tent of Holofernes to her city.

13:11-20, Judith Delivers the Head of Holofernes to the Israelites. ¹¹ Judith called out from afar to the watchmen at the gates, "Open, open the gate! God, our God, is still with us, to show his power in Israel, and his strength against our enemies, even as he has done this day!" ¹² When the men of her city heard her voice, they hurried down to the city gate and called together the elders of the city.

¹³ They all ran together, both small and great, for it was unbelievable that she had returned; they opened the gate and admitted them, and they kindled a fire for light, and gathered around them.

¹⁴ Then she said to them with a loud voice, "Praise God, O praise him! Praise God, who has not withdrawn his **mercy** from the house of Israel; rather **he has destroyed our enemies by my hand** this very night!" ¹⁵ Then she took the head out of the bag and showed it to them, and said, "See, here is the head of Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, and here is the canopy beneath which he lay in his drunken stupor. **The Lord has struck him down by the hand of a woman.**" ¹⁶ As the Lord lives, who has protected me in the way I went, **it was my face that deceived him** to his destruction, and yet he committed no act of sin with me, to defile and shame me."

³ Liddell, Scott, Jones. The standard dictionary for classical Greek.

⁴ See Lewis & Short, *Latin Dictionary*, s.v., *pugio*.

V. 14, Has not withdrawn His Mercy (*eleos*)

Often this translates the Hebrew word *hesed / chesed* (covenant love)

E.g., “for his **mercy** endures forever” (the refrain for Psalm 136; KJV, Douay)
“steadfast love” (RSV, NRSV, NAB, Tanakh); “mercy”

V. 14, **He has destroyed our enemies by my hand**

Judith is confident that God has acted through her. She was the instrument that God used to perform his will. She repeats the same message in V. 15 “The **Lord has struck him** down by the **hand of a woman.**”

Thoughts on Preaching: The main job of the preacher is to tell people **what God is doing.**

The main danger for preachers is violating the second commandment: taking the Lord’s name in vain.

V. 16 My Face Deceived Him! I.e., that’s all he got. He committed no sin with me.

My favorite line. Recall how often the beauty of Judith’s face has been mentioned!⁵

13:17, The People’s Choral Response. ¹⁷ All the people were greatly astonished, and bowed down and worshiped God, and said with one accord, “**Blessed are you, our God**, who hast brought into contempt this day the enemies of your people.”

This is a **choral response**. Anyone used to going to Greek plays would see a **chorus** here.

13:18-20, Uzziah Responds. ¹⁸ And Uzziah said to her, “**O daughter, blessed are you** by the Most High God **above all women** on earth; and **blessed be the Lord God**, who created the heavens and the earth, who has guided you to strike the head of the leader of our enemies. ¹⁹ Your hope will never depart from the hearts of people, as they remember the power of God. ²⁰ **May God make these things** into a perpetual honor for you, and may he visit you with blessings, because you did not spare your own life when our nation was brought low, but have avenged our ruin, walking in the straight path before our God.” And all the people said, “**So be it, so be it!**”

V. 20, May God make these things into a perpetual honor for you

The optative mood! ⁶ It was dying out in Greek. In the NT it appears only in “traditional phrases.”

Consider the subjunctive in contemporary English

“God **ble**ss you” = **May** God **ble**ss you. (Indicative would be: God **bles**ses you.)

Also in the hymn *America the Beautiful* “God shed his grace on thee” is **not** a past tense!

Young people say, “If I **was** you, I would tell him off!”

So be it! So be it! (Another optative). This renders the Hebrew “**Amen.**”

Usually the NT transliterates “amen” rather than translate it.

That is why when the NT is translated into English, “amen” is usually transliterated, rather than translated.

Paul uses this word occurs in the NT, but only in a strongly negative phrase, *mē genoito*. (God forbid!)

Vv. 17-18, Two Blessings. The people bless **God**; Uzziah blesses **Judith** as well as the Lord **God**.

She is blessed “above all women.” This is similar to Elizabeth’s words to Mary (Luke 1:42).

More on the connection of Judith and Marian piety in the next lecture.

⁵ The Greek word is *prosōpon*. 10:7,14,23; 11:21. It will also be mentioned twice in the final poem: 16:6,7. A possible reference is 8:7, where the word *opsis* can be rendered either “beautiful appearance” or “beautiful face.” 14:7 is ambiguous. Most translations render the expression “her face” there as an idiom “her presence.”

⁶ There’s a scene in the movie *Patton*: tanks and jeeps are burning; men are dead and dying. He surveys the scene and says: “I love it **so!** God help me, I love it **so!**” Well, that’s how I am when I see a rare grammatical form!. Sorry, but I can’t help myself.

Week 62, Lecture 191. After the Death of Holofernes , Chapters 14-15.

Context: The Israelites in Bethulia now know of the death of Holofernes. Chapters 14-15 describe the effect this knowledge has on the Gentiles: first Achior, and then the Assyrian Army. The NABRE entitles this section of the book: **V. Victory and Thanksgiving, Judith 14-16**⁷

14:1-4, Judith's Military Strategy. **14:1** Then Judith said to them, "Listen to me, my brethren, and take this head and hang it upon the parapet of your wall. ² And as soon as morning comes and the sun rises, let every valiant man take his weapons and go out of the city, and set a captain over them, as if you were going down to the plain against the Assyrian outpost; only do not go down. ³ Then they will seize their arms and go into the camp and rouse the officers of the Assyrian army; and they will rush into the tent of Holofernes, and will not find him. Then fear will come over them, and they will flee before you, ⁴ and you and all who live within the borders of Israel shall pursue them and cut them down as they flee.

Military Advice / Commands

Here Judith is described after the model of Deborah (Judges 4-5).
Much later Joan of Arc will be an image of the "Woman Holy-Warrior."

Catholic piety often ascribes this imagery to the Virgin Mary

The side altars at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (Washington, DC)

Our Lady Help of Christians

The title of *Mary Help of Christians* is associated with the defense of Christian Europe (Latin and Greek), the north of Africa and the Middle East from non-Christian peoples during the Middle Ages (= 5th-15th centuries)⁸

Our Lady of Prompt Succor (*Notre Dame de Prompt Secours*) = Our Lady Basher of the British

Our Lady of Victory = Mary Basher of Moslems (Battle of Lepanto, 1571)

Now "Our Lady of the Rosary" -- a gesture toward inter-religious dialogue!

14:5-10, Judith and Achior, [Skip to Summary 5-9, then read v. 10]

⁵ But before you do all this, bring **Achior** the Ammonite to me, and let him see and recognize the man who despised the house of Israel and sent him to us as if to his death." ⁶ So they summoned Achior from the house of Uzziah. And when he came and saw the head of Holofernes in the hand of one of the men at the gathering of the people, he fell down on his face and his spirit failed him. ⁷ And when they raised him up he fell at Judith's feet, and knelt before her, and said, "Blessed are you in every tent of Judah! In every nation those who hear your name will be alarmed. ⁸ Now tell me what you have done during these days." Then Judith described to him in the presence of the people all that she had done, from the day she left until the moment of her speaking to them. ⁹ And when she had finished, the people raised a great shout and made a joyful noise in their city.

Summary

Judith orders the people to summon Achior. Because he has seen Holofernes, he can give a positive identification. When he sees the severed head he faints. When he recovers he falls at the feet of Judith to honor her. At his request, she gives the details of how she slew Holofernes. All the people shout with joy.

V. 10, Achior's Conversion.¹⁰ And when Achior saw all that the God of Israel had done, he believed firmly in God, and was circumcised, and joined the house of Israel, remaining so to this day.

⁷ The Major Sections designated by Roman numerals are adapted from the NABRE.

⁸ Not a scholarly reference, but Wiki is good for a "quick check." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Help_of_Christians

Canonical Question

Contrary to Torah. Deuteronomy 23:3 says that no Moabite or Ammonite can ever be part of God's people. After the Exile, Nehemiah recalls this prohibition (Neh 13:1).

When the people heard the law, they separated from Israel **all** those of foreign descent (Neh 13:3). It seems the post-Exilic tendency was to **expand** the force of this law. Is this why Judith is not accepted in the Jewish canon?

14:11-13, Israel Comes out for Battle. ¹¹ As soon as it was dawn they hung the head of Holofernes on the wall, and every man took his weapons, and they went out in companies to the passes in the mountains. ¹² And when the Assyrians saw them they sent word to their commanders, and they went to the generals and the captains and to all their officers. ¹³ So they came to Holofernes' tent and said to the steward in charge of all his personal affairs, "Wake up our lord, for the slaves have been so bold as to come down against us to give battle, in order to be destroyed completely."

A little bit of dramatic suspense. No comments necessary.

14:14-19, Holofernes Is Discovered Dead ¹⁴ So Bagoas went in and knocked at the door of the tent, for he supposed that he was sleeping with Judith. ¹⁵ But when no one answered, he opened it and went into the bedchamber and found him thrown down on the platform dead, with his head cut off and missing. ¹⁶ And he cried out with a loud voice and wept and groaned and shouted, and rent his garments. ¹⁷ Then he went to the tent where Judith had stayed, and when he did not find her he rushed out to the people and shouted, ¹⁸ "The slaves have tricked us! One Hebrew woman has brought disgrace upon the house of King Nebuchadnezzar! For look, here is Holofernes lying on the ground, and his head is not on him!" ¹⁹ When the leaders of the Assyrian army heard this, they rent their tunics and were greatly dismayed, and their loud cries and shouts arose in the midst of the camp.

Judges 3. Some of the elements of the story of left-handed Ehud are found here in Judith. Ehud killed the Moabite King Eglon in his private quarters. His attendants don't discover it until after Ehud has escaped. They don't enter for a long time. They think "he is covering his feet" (= using the rest room).

Summary of 15:1-7.

Chapter 14 ends with the discovery of the beheaded Holofernes.

Like David's defeat of Goliath, this victory by an "underdog" strikes panic in the heart of the enemy.

They flee in disorder.

The message is sent to **all** the warriors of Israel. This is a victory not for one town, but for the whole country.

The Assyrians are defeated with a "great slaughter."

15:1-4, The Assyrians Flee. [Summarize. Don't read in class.] **15:1** When the men in the tents heard it, they were amazed at what had happened. ² Fear and trembling came over them, so that they did not wait for one another, but with one impulse all rushed out and fled by every path across the plain and through the hill country. ³ Those who had camped in the hills around Bethulia also took to flight. Then the men of Israel, every one that was a soldier, rushed out upon them. ⁴ And Uziah sent men to Betomesthaim and Bebai and Choba and Kola, and to **all the frontiers of Israel**, to tell what had taken place and to urge all to rush out upon their enemies to destroy them.

15:5-7, All Israel Pursues. [Summarize. Don't read in class.] ⁵ And when the Israelites heard it, with one accord they fell upon the enemy, and cut them down as far as Choba. Those in Jerusalem and all the hill country also came, for they were told what had happened in the camp of the enemy; and those in Gilead and in Galilee outflanked them **with great slaughter**, even beyond Damascus and its borders. ⁶ The rest of the people of Bethulia fell upon the Assyrian camp and plundered it, and were

greatly enriched. ⁷ And the Israelites, when they returned from the slaughter, took possession of what remained, and the villages and towns in the hill country and in the plain got a great amount of booty, for there was a vast quantity of it.

15:8-10, Arrival of High Priest & Jerusalem Leaders. ⁸ Then Joakim the high priest, and the senate of the people of Israel who lived at Jerusalem, came to witness the good things which the Lord had done for Israel, and to see Judith and to greet her. ⁹ And when they met her they all blessed her with one accord and said to her, "**You are the exaltation of Jerusalem, you are the great glory of Israel, you are the great pride of our nation!**" ¹⁰ **You have done all this singlehanded; you have done great good to Israel, and God is well pleased with it. May the Almighty Lord bless you for ever!**" And all the people said, "So be it!"

Lucien Deiss (Catholic Composer) was inspired by this passage.

You are the greatest joy of Israel Holy Virgin Mary!

You are the glory of Jerusalem Holy Virgin Mary!

Another instance of how the story of Judith has influenced Catholic piety.

This music from the 1960's was less militaristic than the medieval incarnation of this piety.

15:11-13, Judith is enriched & honored by all. ¹¹ So all the people plundered the camp for thirty days. They gave Judith the tent of Holofernes and all his silver dishes and his beds and his bowls and all his furniture; and she took them and loaded her mule and hitched up her carts and piled the things on them. ¹² Then all the women of Israel gathered to see her, and blessed her, and some of them performed a dance for her; and she took branches in her hands and gave them to the women who were with her; ¹³ and they crowned themselves with olive wreaths, she and those who were with her; and she went before all the people in the dance, leading all the women, while all the men of Israel followed, bearing their arms and wearing garlands and with songs on their lips.

Final Victorious Scene

I am reminded of the celebrations at the end of *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings*

This concludes the prose version of the story of Judith's Victory over Holofernes.

It will be followed by a poem, and a brief epilogue.

These are treated in chapter 16.