

## Week 63, Lecture 192.<sup>1</sup> Judith's Hymn of Praise, Judith 16:1-17

### Context.

Chapter 13: the beheading of Holofernes by Judith, her escape from the Assyrians & return to Bethulia.

Chapter 14: The Ammonite Achior converts to Judaism; the Israelites follow the strategy outlined by Judith; the Assyrians discover their general has been beheaded by a woman.

Chapter 15: The Assyrians flee and are slaughtered; the High Priest & leaders come from Jerusalem. "All Israel" has gathered to celebrate the victory and to praise Judith.

### 16:1-12, Judith's Songs of Praise. **Introductory Comments**

I am not an expert on Hebrew poetry.

I learned a little taking electives in the Semitics Department while working on my NT degree.

So I am just going to point out "obvious examples" of how Hebrew poetry works.

References to my two best Hebrew Teachers: Aloysius Fitzgerald; Adele Berlin<sup>2</sup>

### Toni Craven's Structural Analysis

- I. Hymnic Introduction 1-2
- II. Narration of the Epic Event 3-12
- III. Hymnic Response 13-17

**Prose Introduction.** Then Judith began this thanksgiving before all Israel, and all the people loudly sang this song of praise <sup>2</sup> And Judith said,

#### I. Hymnic Introduction, 1-2<sup>3</sup>

Begin for my God with tambourines,  
sing for my Lord with cymbals.

Synonymous parallelism

Harmonize for him a new psalm;<sup>4</sup>  
exalt and call upon his name.

variation: no instrument!

<sup>2</sup> For God is the Lord who crushes wars;  
for he has delivered me out of the hands of my pursuers,  
and brought me to his camp, in the midst of the people.

Step parallelism<sup>5</sup>

### Comment on Synonymous Parallelism and Step Parallelism

Throughout the poem, where synonymous parallelism is obvious, I have tried to show this with highlighting.

#### II. Narration of the Epic Event, 3-12

<sup>3</sup> The Assyrian came down from the mountains of the north;  
he came with myriads of his warriors;  
their multitude blocked up the valleys,  
their cavalry covered the hills.

Supplementation  
or step parallelism

<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> Aloysius Fitzgerald, "Hebrew Poetry," *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Prentice Hall, 1990), 201-208; Adele Berlin, "Parallelism," *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Doubleday, 1992), 155-162.

<sup>3</sup> The verses are numbered differently in various translations. I am following the enumeration in the Greek, not the RSV, as does the NABRE.

<sup>4</sup> Some manuscripts read KAIAINON i.e., a psalm "and praise." Others read KAINON "new," literally, "a psalm, a new one."

<sup>5</sup> Step parallelism takes the basic idea, and advances it another "step."

<sup>4</sup> He boasted that he would burn up my territory,  
and kill my young men with the sword,  
and dash my infants to the ground  
and seize my children as prey,  
and take my virgins as booty.

Antithetic Par. begins

Synonymous within antithetic

<sup>5</sup> But the Lord Almighty has foiled them  
by the hand of a female.

Antithetic Par. ends

**Antithetic Parallelism:** The **boast** of the Assyrians contrasts with God's saving activity, which **foiled them**. This antithetic parallelism "frames" this section.

### Synonymous Parallelism:

I thought there were going to be 4 perfectly parallel lines,

but the parallelism in the first line -- "with the sword" is imperfect.

No weapon is mentioned in the next three lines -- which are synonymous parallelism

This leaves the reader (hearer) wondering why other weapons were not mentioned.

And in the back of the hearer's mind is the question: "What about that sword?"

Many translations say, **hand of a "woman."**

But this is the same Greek word we find in Genesis, "male and *female* God created them."

And it is not mentioned that this hand of a female was **wielding a sword!**

One could understand this to mean that God's main weapon was Judith's **hand**.

Or -- more likely -- because of the poetic antithesis, the reader is **expected to imagine** a sword in her hand.

The poet does not need to state it. The reader has been wondering about it for a few lines!

Hebrew poetry is marvelously terse! (Laconic -- from the Greek name for Sparta)

<sup>6</sup> For their mighty one was not downed by young men,  
nor did the sons of the Titans smite him,  
nor did tall giants set upon him;  
But Judith the daughter of Merari  
by the beauty of her face undid him.

Notice the color coding:

**Yellow for Holofernes**, gray for what happened to him; **blue for his opponent**.

Notice also what is *not color coded!* Her face!

It is not color coded because **nothing -- i.e., no weapon! -- corresponds to it in the first three lines.**

The **absence of a parallel** makes Judith's main weapon "stand out!"

<sup>7</sup> For she took off the garment of her widowhood  
to exalt the oppressed in Israel.

Step

She anointed her face with ointment

Synonymous

<sup>8</sup> and fastened her hair with a tiara

and put on a linen gown to deceive him.

parallelism broken

<sup>9</sup> Her sandal ravished his eyes,

more Synonymous par.

her beauty captivated his mind,

and the sword severed his neck.

The "broken" parallelism calls attention to Judith's other main weapon: deception.

<sup>10</sup> **The Persians trembled at her boldness,  
the Medes were daunted at her daring.**

### Medes and Persians

Just why they appear here is puzzling. They have played no part in the story of Judith.

The “Persians” have never been mentioned by name, though their mighty city Ecbatana was mentioned in 1:2.

The Medes were mentioned in 1:1, but they have not been heard from since then in the story of Judith!

The “Medes and the Persians” are mentioned in the same verse 4 times in Daniel! (5:28; 6:28,12,15)

Daniel appears to have been written a little before the book of Judith.

<sup>11</sup> **Then my oppressed people shouted for joy;  
my weak people shouted and the enemy trembled;  
they lifted up their voices, and the enemy were turned back.**

Step

<sup>12</sup> **The sons of maidservants pierced them;  
like deserter’s children, they wounded them  
they perished before the army of my Lord.**

Synonymous with Step  
another step, with chiasm

**Chiasm -- A Greek *Chi* looks like an X**

**they** [Israelites]                      **wounded**                      **them** [Assyrians]

**they** [Assyrians]                      **perished**                      **the army of the Lord** [Israelites]

This elegant literary device marks the end of this section of the poem.

### III. Hymnic Response, 13-17

<sup>13</sup> **I will sing to my God a new song:  
O Lord, you are great and glorious,  
wonderful in strength, invincible.**

<sup>14</sup> **Let all your creatures serve you,  
for you did speak, and they were made.  
You did send forth your spirit, and it built [them];  
there is none that can resist your voice.**

<sup>15</sup> **For mountains with waters will be shaken from their foundations;  
and rocks, at your presence, will melt like wax!  
but to those who fear you, you will show mercy.**

Synonymous

antithetic? not really!

<sup>16</sup> **For every sacrifice as a fragrant offering [is] a small thing,  
and all fat for burnt offerings to you [is] something very small,  
but the one who fears the Lord [is] great for ever.**

Synonymous

Antithetic parallelism

<sup>17</sup> **Woe to the nations that rise up against my people!  
The Lord Ruler-of-All will take vengeance on them in the day of judgment;  
Fire and worms he will send into their flesh,  
and they shall weep in pain for ever.**

### One Hymn or Two?

There is a debate among scholars as to whether verses 13 -17 were originally part of the same hymn as 1-12.

Toni Craven has argued for the poem as a 3-part literary unity.

However, when analyzing it, I found it relatively easy to discover various forms of parallelism in vv. 1-12.

Many of the lines contained **three basic ideas**.

The parallelism was not as easy for me to pick out in the final verses -- but I'm not an expert!

Most of the lines contained **two ideas**.

There is **nothing specific about Judith** in these verses.

They praise God in a "general" way for **creation** and **redemption** (= defense against enemies).

### A Literary Unity?

Obviously **somebody** thought these verses "fit."

However, the style is different enough that I am wondering if they were composed by the same author.

In the Psalms there are several passages where consecutive verses from one psalm are repeated in another.

So we know that sometimes ancient composers used "boilerplate."

## Week 63, Lecture 193. Conclusion & Epilogue, Judith 16:18-25

In an **Earlier Lecture** I put the "conclusion" at the end of chapter 15.

I had forgotten about verses 18-20, the short piece of prose after the poetry!

This is what happens when you have an "NT guy" doing "Old Testament Lectures!"

**16:18-20, Celebration in Jerusalem.** <sup>18</sup> When they arrived at Jerusalem they worshiped God. As soon as the people **were purified**, they offered their burnt offerings, their freewill offerings, and their gifts. <sup>19</sup> Judith also dedicated to God all the vessels of Holofernes, which the people had given her; and the canopy which she took for herself from his bedchamber she gave as a votive offering to the Lord. <sup>20</sup> So the people continued feasting in Jerusalem before the sanctuary for three months, and Judith remained with them.

**V. 18, The People were Purified.** There were two main reasons:

1) People who are in contact with a dead body need to be purified

This can come from a "normal event," e.g., the death of a relative

How much more in the case of war -- multiple dead bodies, friend and foe

2) **Bodily fluids rendered a person "unclean" / "impure"**

Menstruation rendered a woman "unclean." Seminal emission rendered a man "unclean."

If a young unmarried man had a "wet dream" he needed "purification"

When a married man had relations with his wife, both of them were rendered unclean.

"Most people were unclean most of the time" [E.P. Sanders]

### Not a "Big Deal"

For most Jews, being impure was not a "big deal" **unless** they were going to worship in the Jerusalem Temple.

For those who lived in Galilee -- or in Babylon, or Rome, or Alexandria Egypt -- this would be **rare**.

And even for those who lived in Jerusalem, it would not be a **daily** occurrence.

The early Christians who prayed daily in the Temple were an example of **exceptional** piety.

Even for priests it would not be a daily problem.

Priests did not have to offer sacrifice every day; they took turns.

Bottom line: for "Joe and Mary Jew" living outside Jerusalem being "impure / unclean" was not a "big deal."

**The Pilgrimage Routine** -- "out-of-town" Jews come to Jerusalem

There are many pools around the city. When they arrived, they would bathe.

That night they would refrain from sexual relations with their spouse.

The next day they would sacrifice in the Temple

-- for the poor this would be one of times meat would be a major portion of their meal instead of a condiment  
After the sacrifice, they would begin their journey home  
That evening, most of them would be “unclean / impure” again.

### **The distinction between “impurity” and “sin.”**

In Catholic theology, “impurity” almost always refers to some kind of sexual sin.

In Jewish theology “impurity” can come from a sinful act

e.g., murder, rape

But most “impurity” is comes from doing things that are actually pious and holy

e.g., burying one of your parents, having sexual relations with your spouse

Sin would only be involved if one entered the Temple in such a state.

### **A Catholic Analogy**

After communion the chalice needs to be “purified.” The cloth that is used is called a “purificator.”

Why does the chalice need to be “purified?” Why is the chalice “impure?”

Because it has been in contact with blood, the “Blood of Christ!”

This is one of the **rare** instances where Catholic theology considers something very sacred “impure.”

This idea is much more common in Jewish thought.

### **A Positive Attitude toward Human Sexuality**

In general, Jewish thought has a positive attitude about human sexual activity in the context of marriage.

Eventually negative Hellenistic ideas about human sexuality began to influence biblical interpretation.

This was more common in Christianity than in mainstream Judaism,

but it affected both traditions in the post-biblical period.

Bottom line: to understand biblical thinking about “impurity / uncleanness”

one must **empty one’s mind** of the idea of “impurity” found in Catholic catechisms!

**16:21-25, Epilogue.** <sup>21</sup> After this every one returned home to his own inheritance, and Judith went to Bethulia, and remained on her estate, and was honored in her time throughout the whole country. <sup>22</sup> Many desired to marry her, but she remained a **widow** all the days of her life after Manasseh her husband died and was gathered to his people. <sup>23</sup> She became more and more famous, and grew old in her husband's house, until she was **one hundred and five years old**. She **set her maid free**. She died in Bethulia, and they buried her in the cave of her husband Manasseh, <sup>24</sup> and the house of Israel mourned for her seven days. Before she died she **distributed her property** to all those who were next of kin to her husband Manasseh, and to her own nearest kindred. <sup>25</sup> And no one ever again spread terror among the people of Israel in the days of Judith, or **for a long time** after her death.

## **V. 22, Widows -- role in Early Christianity**

### **V. 23, 105 years old**

No hope of resurrection is expressed in Judith. A very long life is the reward of the just

NT times (shortly after Judith) -- the doctrine of resurrection is widely known, but disputed.

Pharisees accept the new doctrine of resurrection. They are educated **laity** -- like most students of this course!

Sadducees do not accept this new doctrine. They are **clergy**, conservatives who believe in the “old time religion.”

**Set her maid free.** The anonymous faithful fellow-heroine

As in **Paul’s letter to Philemon**, no critique of the institution of slavery.

Paul sends Onesimus, a runaway slave, back to his owner **Philemon**, with a strong “hint” he ought to set him free.

Here, freedom is the reward of a good slave; in Philemon it is a “personal favor” to Paul.

Remember: Paul thought the world was going to in in a few months/ years.

There was no point in trying to make major changes in the structures of human society.

Especially when Christians were a tiny portion of the population, less than 1/10 of one percent.

Granting slaves freedom was in accord with Hellenistic & Roman culture.

“Freedmen”

**V. 24, Distributed her property.** To the end of her life, Judith is portrayed as a “woman in charge.”

### **The “Cycle” of the Book of Judges**

- 1) God’s People Sin
- 2) They are punished with oppression
- 3) The repent and cry out to God
- 4) The LORD sends a judge who saves them
- 5) The people are faithful as long as the judge lives

**V. 25, Similar to Conclusions in the Book of Judges** (i.e. conclusions to the story of **each one** of the Judges)

Judges is part of Deuteronomistic History (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings)

Most of this material was put in its final edited form during the Babylonian Exile.

### **Explanation of Deuteronomistic Theology**

We are not slaves in Babylon because the LORD our God was not powerful enough to protect us.

We are slaves here because we were disobedient, and the LORD is punishing us.

### **Paradoxically, this is grounds for hope!**

If we are here because Marduk is stronger than the LORD, we are here as slaves forever.

If we are here because the LORD is punishing us, maybe he will have mercy.

### **Same theology underlies Judith**

The mention that things went well **for a long time** after her death is an addition to the formula.

In a way, this makes Judith more outstanding than many of the heroes of the book of Judges!