



The Book of Judith is an edifying narrative (see introduction of Esther). It was inspired by records and legends of the national resistance at the time of the Maccabees.

There was a promise made by God to Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3); it is insisted upon more clearly in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. According to this promise, God would defend his people when they were faithful to the Law, but would deliver them to their enemies whenever they did not follow the Law.

The Book of Judith (*Judith* means the *Jewess*) attempts to demonstrate that God keeps his promise.

God's people returned from exile a short time before. They rebuilt the capital, Jerusalem, restored the Temple and the worship of God, and were resettling in the entire country. In short, they were living a period of faithfulness to God and, according to his promise, God would protect them.

#### A power that destroys

**1** <sup>1</sup>It was in the twelfth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, who ruled in the great city of Nineveh that, at the same time, Arphaxad, king of the Medes, ruled at Ecbatana. <sup>2</sup>Arphaxad had built around Ecbatana ramparts of stone, with each stone cut to the size of one and a half meters wide and three meters long. The ramparts were thirty-five meters high and twenty-five meters wide. <sup>3</sup>He built at the gates city towers which were fifty meters high and rested on foundations twenty meters wide. <sup>4</sup>The gates themselves were thirty-five meters high and twenty meters wide, wide enough for his valiant warriors and foot soldiers to march through them in battle array. <sup>5</sup>In those days, King Nebuchadnezzar made war on King Arphaxad in the Great Plain, that is, the plain near the territory of the Ragae.

<sup>6</sup>All the people who lived in the mountains, those who lived along the banks of the rivers Euphrates, Tigris and Hydaspes, those on the plains of Arioch, king of the Elamites, and many other peoples joined the ranks of the Chaldeans to fight against the sons of Cheleoud.

<sup>7</sup>Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, sent his messengers to all those living in Persia and in the West, to the inhabitants of Cilicia, Damascus, Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, to those along the seacoast, <sup>8</sup>to the people of Carmel, Gilead, Upper Galilee and the Great Plain of Esdraelon, <sup>9</sup>to those in

Samaria and its towns, and beyond the Jordan as far as Jerusalem, Bethany, Chelous, Kadesh, the River of Egypt, Tahpanhes, Raamses, and all the country of Goshen <sup>10</sup>as far as the region beyond Tanis and Memphis, and to all the inhabitants of Egypt as far as the country of Ethiopia.

<sup>11</sup>But the inhabitants of all these regions took no notice of the order of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, and did not join him in waging war. They no longer feared him because they considered him just like any other man. They sent back his messengers empty-handed and shamefaced.

<sup>12</sup>Nebuchadnezzar was greatly enraged against all these regions and swore by his throne and by his kingdom to punish all the districts of Cilicia, Damascus and Syria, and to put to the sword all who were in the lands of Moab, Ammon, the whole of Judea, and all those in Egypt as far as the coasts between the two seas. <sup>13</sup>In the seventeenth year, Nebuchadnezzar went to battle with his army against King Arphaxad, and conquered him in the campaign. He drove back the army of Arphaxad with all his cavalry and chariots.

<sup>14</sup>Nebuchadnezzar occupied all the cities. Finally, he reached Ecbatana where he demolished its towers, pillaged the streets of the city and reduced its splendor to ruins. <sup>15</sup>He pursued Arphaxad into the mountains of the Ragae, pierced him through with arrows and utterly destroyed him. <sup>16</sup>Then he returned to Nineveh with a great crowd of followers and a considerable multitude of soldiers. He and

his entire army stayed there amusing themselves and feasting for one hundred and twenty days.

**2** <sup>1</sup>On the twenty-second day of the first month in the eighteenth year of his reign, there was talk in the House of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, of punishing all those who had disobeyed the king's commands. <sup>2</sup>He called together his ministers and his noblemen, and told them his secret plan. <sup>3</sup>He proclaimed publicly the total destruction of the land and the punishment of all those who had disregarded his call.

<sup>4</sup>As soon as Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, had made this decision, he summoned Holofernes, the chief general of his army who was second in command, and said to him, <sup>5</sup>"So says the Great King, Lord of all the earth, you will set out from my presence, taking with you men of true courage, about one hundred and twenty thousand foot soldiers and a great number of horses with about twelve thousand cavalymen. <sup>6</sup>You will go to all the countries in the West and punish all the peoples, because they disregarded my orders. <sup>7</sup>Tell them to submit themselves to me on land and water, lest in my anger I myself march against them. I will cover all the face of the earth with the footprints of my army, and I will give them over to my men to be plundered by them. <sup>8</sup>The ravines will be filled with their wounded, rivers and torrents will be full of their dead. <sup>9</sup>I will lead away their prisoners as captives to the uttermost parts of the earth. <sup>10</sup>Go, then, and occupy in my name all their territories; if they surrender to you, keep them for me that I may punish them. <sup>11</sup>Show no pity to those who resist you. Hand them over to be massacred and plundered throughout all their lands. <sup>12</sup>For, as truly as I live and by the power of my kingdom, I will carry out with my own hands what I have said. <sup>13</sup>And you, do not disobey the words of your lord nor fail to carry them out exactly as I have instructed you. Do not change any of them."

<sup>14</sup>Holofernes went out from the presence of his lord and called together all the chiefs of staff, the generals and commanders of the army of Assyria. <sup>15</sup>He gathered about a hundred and twenty thousand specially chosen men for the army as his lord had ordered him, and twelve thousand archers. <sup>16</sup>He arranged them in battle positions. <sup>17</sup>He took along camels, donkeys and mules to carry the baggage, and a great number of sheep, oxen, and goats for their food. <sup>18</sup>He took a sufficient quantity of provisions for each man, and an

abundant supply of gold and silver from the king's treasury.

<sup>19</sup>Then Holofernes set out on the march with all his army, with their chariots, cavalry and picked foot soldiers going ahead of King Nebuchadnezzar to cover all the lands to the West with this army. <sup>20</sup>They were accompanied by a great crowd of people, so many were they that they were like locusts or the dust of the earth.

<sup>21</sup>After marching for three days from Nineveh, Holofernes and his men reached the plain of Bectileth where they encamped before the city, near the mountains to the north of Upper Cilicia. <sup>22</sup>Then Holofernes took all his army, foot soldiers, cavalry and chariots, and marched into the mountain region. <sup>23</sup>He utterly destroyed Put and Lud, and plundered all the land of Rassis and of Ishmael on the border of the desert to the south of the country of the Chaldeans. <sup>24</sup>Then he followed the Euphrates, crossed Mesopotamia and destroyed all the cities high above the torrent of Abron until he reached the sea. <sup>25</sup>He took possession of the land of Cilicia, and cut down all who opposed him, and arrived at the land of Japheth in the south toward Arabia. <sup>26</sup>He surrounded all the children of Midian, burned their tents and destroyed their livestock. <sup>27</sup>Then descending to the plain of Damascus at the time of the wheat harvest, he burned all their fields, scattered all their animals and killed the young ones, pillaged their villages, devastated their plains, and put all their young men to the sword.

<sup>28</sup>The fear and terror of him fell upon all the inhabitants of the seacoast, those in Tyre and Sidon, in Sur, Ocina and Jamnia. The people of Azotus and Ascalon also feared him.

**3** <sup>1</sup>They therefore sent messengers to Holofernes offering him terms of peace: <sup>2</sup>"See, we consider ourselves as servants of Nebuchadnezzar, the great king, do with us as you will. <sup>3</sup>All our farms, our whole territory, all our wheatfields, our oxen and our sheepfolds lie before you – use them as you please. <sup>4</sup>See, our towns and all their inhabitants are yours, deal with them as you wish." <sup>5</sup>These men went to Holofernes and repeated these words.

<sup>6</sup>Then Holofernes moved down to the seacoast with his army. He stationed garrisons in the hill cities and took from them men whom he chose as auxiliaries. <sup>7</sup>The people of these cities received him, as did all the people of the surrounding countryside, with garlands, singing and dancing to the music of tambou-

<sup>1Mac</sup>  
<sup>3:28</sup>

• **2.1** Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Nineveh, passes a law demanding to be acknowledged as the only god; people resist. The king sends his

armies to force people to comply; he defeats the powerful king of the Medes, but the Jewish people, unlike the others, refuse to submit.

<sup>2Mac 6:7</sup> rines. <sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, he still laid waste all their land, cut down their sacred woods and destroyed all their gods, that all people of all languages and nations might worship Nebuchadnezzar alone and proclaim him as god.

<sup>9</sup> Then he arrived opposite Esdraelon, near Dothan, facing the great chain of Judean hills. <sup>10</sup> He encamped between Geba Scythopolis, and remained there a month in order to reorganize the provisions of his army.

**4** <sup>1</sup> The children of Israel in Judea learned what had happened to the other nations at the hands of Holofernes, the chief general of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Assyrians, and how he had plundered the neighboring villages and destroyed their sanctuaries. <sup>2</sup> And they trembled with great fear because of him. They were anxious about Jerusalem and the Temple of the Lord their God, <sup>3</sup> since they had only recently returned from exile. The people of Judea had just come together and the new furnishings of the Altar and the Sanctuary had just been consecrated after being profaned. <sup>4</sup> They sent messengers to warn all the inhabitants of the territory of Samaria, Kona, Beth-horon, Belmain, Jericho, Choba and Aesora, and the valley of Salem. <sup>5</sup> They occupied all the summits of the mountains, fortified the ramparts of the towns and prepared stores of foodstuff and provisions for the war, since their field had just been harvested.

<sup>6</sup> Joakim, the high priest, who was in Jerusalem in those days, wrote to the inhabitants of Bethulia and Betomesthaim opposite Esdraelon, at the entrance to the plain of Dothan. <sup>7</sup> He told them to seize and fortify the mountain passes because it was by them that Holofernes would enter Judea. There it would be easy to stop those who were advancing since the narrow passes allowed no more than two men to go forward at a time.

<sup>8</sup> The children of Israel obeyed the orders of Joakim and of the Council of the Elders which assembled in Jerusalem. <sup>9</sup> All the people of Israel called upon God with great fervor and humbled themselves before him. <sup>10</sup> Men, women and children, including the animals, all the foreigners who resided among them, their laborers and slaves, all clothed themselves in sackcloth. <sup>11</sup> All the men of Israel in Jerusalem, with their wives and children, bowed before the Temple, sprinkled ashes on their heads and held out their hands in supplication before the Lord. <sup>12</sup> They covered the Altar in sackcloth, and with one voice earnestly begged the God of Israel not to let their children be massacred, their wives raped, their towns destroyed and their Sanctuary profaned, that they might not become the laughingstock of other nations.

<sup>13</sup> The Lord heard their prayer and looked upon their anguish. The people throughout the whole of Judea fasted for many days, and those in Jerusalem fasted before the Sanctuary of the Lord Almighty. <sup>14</sup> The high priest Joakim, with all the priests and ministers, stood before the Lord dressed in sackcloth, and offered continual sacrifice, prayers and the voluntary gifts of the people. <sup>15</sup> They put ashes on their turbans and cried out with all their strength to the Lord, asking him to watch over the whole house of Israel.

**5** <sup>1</sup> It was reported to Holofernes that the people of Israel were prepared for war, that they had closed the mountain passes, fortified the ramparts on the summits of all the high mountains and placed blockades in the plains. <sup>2</sup> Seething with anger, Holofernes called the leaders of the Moabites, the generals of Ammon and all the governors of the Seacoast, <sup>3</sup> and said to them, "Tell me, sons of Canaan, who are these people living in the mountain region? Which towns do they inhabit? What is the strength of their army? In what does their power and strength consist? Who has been placed at their head as commander of their army? <sup>4</sup> Why have they not appeared before me like everyone else in the West?"

<sup>5</sup> Achior, commander of the Ammonites, said to him, "May my Lord listen to the word spoken by your servant, for I will tell you the truth about these people from the mountain region whom you now encounter. <sup>6</sup> These people descend from the Chaldeans. <sup>7</sup> They settled first in Mesopotamia, for they did not wish to worship any longer the gods of their ancestors who lived in Chaldea. <sup>8</sup> They abandoned the religion of their ancestors, and worshiped the God of Heaven, a God whom they had come to recognize. Because of this their fathers drove them out and they fled to Mesopotamia where they dwelt for a long time. <sup>9</sup> Then their God told them to leave the country where they had settled and go to the land of Canaan. They went to live there, and acquired an abundance of gold and silver and numerous herds of cattle.

<sup>10</sup> There was famine throughout the land of Canaan, so they went down into Egypt where they remained as long as there was food. Then they became so numerous that their race could not be counted. <sup>11</sup> But the king of Egypt rose up against them and tricked them into making bricks, and they were humiliated and made into slaves. <sup>12</sup> They called upon their God who punished the whole of Egypt with such incurable plagues that the Egyptians drove them out. <sup>13</sup> Then God dried up the Red Sea in front of them <sup>14</sup> and he led them along the route of Sinai and Kadesh Barnea. The Israelites drove all the inhabitants into

<sup>2Mac 10:25</sup>

<sup>Acts 7</sup>



the desert;<sup>15</sup> they inhabited the country of the Amorites and wiped out the Heshbonites. Then, having crossed the Jordan, they took possession of all the hill country,<sup>16</sup> driving out the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Shechemites, and the Gergesites, and they lived there for a long time.

<sup>17</sup>As long as they did not offend God, they prospered, because their God who hates wrongdoing was on their side. <sup>18</sup>But when they strayed from the path he had set for them, they were completely annihilated in many battles, and they were led off into captivity in a country not their own. The temple of their God was leveled to the ground and their cities were occupied by their enemies. <sup>19</sup>Now that they have turned again to their God, they have returned from exile from the various places in which they had been scattered. They have retaken Jerusalem where their Sanctuary is and they have settled in the mountain region because it has remained deserted. <sup>20</sup>And now, Sovereign Lord, we must find out if there is any wrongdoing in this people. <sup>21</sup>If they are sinning against their God, then we shall march against them and we shall conquer. But if there is no sinfulness in their nation, then, my Lord, turn aside from them for fear that their Lord and God will cover them with his shield and the whole world will witness our downfall.”

<sup>2Mac</sup>  
<sup>3:39</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Now it happened that when Achior had finished speaking, all the people standing in a circle around the tent began criticizing and protesting. The officers of Holofernes and all the inhabitants of the seacoast and of Moab wanted to beat him black and blue. They said, <sup>23</sup>“We are not afraid of the children of Israel. Look, they are a people with no strength or energy to sustain a violent conflict. <sup>24</sup>Let us go forth, and they will be like bread for your whole army, O Lord Holofernes!”

**6**<sup>1</sup>When the tumult among the men standing around the tent had died down, Holofernes, general in chief of the Assyrian army, said to Achior in the presence of all the foreigners and all the people of Moab, <sup>2</sup>“Who are you, Achior, you and all the people bribed by Israel to prophesy against us as you have done today? Why do you counsel us not to make war on the race of Israel because their God will cover them with a shield? Who is God, if not Nebuchadnezzar. He will send out his army and wipe them off the face of the earth and their God will not save them. <sup>3</sup>But we, the king’s servants, will crush them as though they were just one man. They will not withstand the onslaught of our horses. <sup>4</sup>We will burn the whole lot of them in their own homes. Their mountains will be soaked with their blood, their plains will be full of their

<sup>2K</sup>  
<sup>18:35</sup>

dead. They will not be able to hold their ground before us. Most surely they will perish, as King Nebuchadnezzar, lord of all the earth, had foretold. He said it and the words he has uttered will not be in vain.

<sup>5</sup>But you, Achior, an Ammonite mercenary who has today uttered these words to your shame, from now on you will not see my face until I avenge myself on this race who came from Egypt. <sup>6</sup>The sword of my soldiers and the lance of my officers will pierce your sides. When I return from battle, your body will be with all the dead of Israel. <sup>7</sup>My servants will lead you into the mountain region and will deposit you in one of the towns which are on the slopes, <sup>8</sup>so that you will share the same fate as the rest of them. <sup>9</sup>But if you believe that they will not be taken, then do not put on such a long face. I have spoken and not one of my words will be without effect.”

<sup>10</sup>Holofernes ordered his guards who were standing in the tent to seize Achior, take him to Bethulia and hand him over into the hands of the Israelites. <sup>11</sup>The servants seized him and took him outside the camp onto the plain; from the middle of the plain they took him towards the mountain country and reached the springs which were at the foot of Bethulia. <sup>12</sup>When the men of the town at the top of the mountain saw them coming, they took their weapons, went out of the town to the summit of the mountain, and those who were armed with catapults tried to stop their ascent by slinging stones at them. <sup>13</sup>The guards took shelter, tied up Achior and left him lying on the ground at the foot of the mountain. They then returned to their lord.

<sup>14</sup>The Israelites descended from the town and went up to Achior, and having untied him, they led him to Bethulia, and took him to the rulers of the town, <sup>15</sup>who in those days were Uziah the son of Micah of the tribe of Simeon, Chabris the son of Gothoniel, and Charmis the son of Melchiel. <sup>16</sup>As they called for a meeting of all the elders of the town, the young people and the women also joined the assembly. They placed Achior in the midst of the assembled people and Uziah asked him what had happened. <sup>17</sup>In reply he told them about the council meeting of Holofernes and all that he himself had said to the leaders of the Assyrians. He also told them of the threatening words of Holofernes against Israel.

<sup>Jl</sup>  
<sup>2:16</sup>

<sup>18</sup>The people threw themselves down on the ground, worshiped God and called upon his help saying, <sup>19</sup>“Lord God of Heaven, take into consideration the insolence of the Assyrians and have pity on your humiliated people. Look this day upon those who are consecrated to you.” <sup>20</sup>They encouraged Achior and congratulated him warmly. <sup>21</sup>Then Uziah led him from the assembly into his own house and gave a meal for the elders.

<sup>2K</sup>  
<sup>19:4</sup>

All through the night the people called upon the God of Israel, begging him to come to their aid.

**7**<sup>1</sup>The next day Holofernes gave an order to the whole of his army and to those people who had come to his help to move camp in the direction of Bethulia, to occupy the mountain slopes and to wage war against the Israelites.<sup>2</sup>All his valiant warriors moved that day; the forces of fighting men numbered one hundred and seventy thousand foot soldiers and twelve thousand cavalry, without counting the baggage and the men who looked after it as well as the crowd of people who accompanied them – a considerable crowd.<sup>3</sup>They camped in the valley near Bethulia, near the spring; they spread out the whole width from Dothan to Belbain, and the length from Bethulia to Cyamon which faces Esdraelon.

Num 22:4<sup>4</sup>When the Israelites saw how numerous they were, they were extremely afraid and said to one another, “Without doubt this crowd is going to devour all the country, neither the high mountains nor the ravines nor the hills will be able to put a stop to their progress.”<sup>5</sup>Nonetheless each one seized his fighting equipment; they lit fires on the tops of the towers and kept watch all that night.

<sup>6</sup>The second day, Holofernes lined up all his cavalry in front of the Israelites in Bethulia.<sup>7</sup>He observed the approaches to their town, discovered the sources supplying water, seized them and stationed guards over them, then he returned to his army.<sup>8</sup>The leaders of the Edomites, the commanders of the Moabites and the generals of the Seacoast approached Holofernes and said,<sup>9</sup>“Let our Master listen to us, and your army will not suffer loss.<sup>10</sup>This people of Israel really do not put their trust in javelins but in the height of the mountains which they inhabit, for it is not easy to reach the summit of their mountains.<sup>11</sup>Master, if you wish to save the lives of your men, do not fight against them in battle formation.<sup>12</sup>Remain in your camp and keep all the men in your army safe but let us take possession of the spring which flows at the foot of the mountain,<sup>13</sup>because it is from

there that the people of Bethulia draw all their water. They will be dying of thirst and so they will hand over their town. We and our people will scale the summits of the neighboring mountains and set up outposts to prevent anyone from leaving the town.<sup>14</sup>The famine will destroy them; men, women and children will be lying dead in the streets of their town before ever the sword is raised against them.<sup>15</sup>So you will have punished them severely for having rebelled and for not having come out to meet you with offers of peace.”

<sup>16</sup>This advice pleased Holofernes and all his officers, and he agreed to do what they said.<sup>17</sup>The Moabites, with five thousand Assyrians, moved camp; they encamped in the valley and cut off the springs and the water supply from the Israelites.<sup>18</sup>The Edomites and the Ammonites climbed up and camped on the mountain near Dothan; they sent some of their men to the south and to the east facing Egrel, near Chusi, which is on the torrent of Mochmur. The rest of the Assyrian army encamped in the plain, covering the whole countryside. The camp site covered by their tents and their baggage spread out wide for they were an enormous crowd.

### The discouragement of the people

•<sup>19</sup>Disheartened, the people of Israel called upon the Lord their God because their enemies had encircled them and had cut off all means of escape.<sup>20</sup>All the Assyrian army, its foot soldiers, its chariots and horsemen surrounded them for thirty-four days.<sup>21</sup>The inhabitants of Bethulia saw the water jars becoming empty and the wells running dry so that drinking water had to be rationed every day.<sup>22</sup>The small children became weak with thirst; the women and the young collapsed in the streets and gateways of the town.<sup>23</sup>Then everyone – men, women,

• **7.19** When a community starts to look only at what is evil, its bad luck, it begins to lose faith in the future and forgets it has means for getting out of the situation.

*God has delivered us into the hands of these pagans.* The people of Bethulia declare their defeat beforehand because they only see the human side of the situation which is unpleasant, and do not remember God's promise (Lev 26 and Dt 28). They have prayed and have done penance, but in spite of all that, God is deaf to their pleas. The conclusion is obvious: “We are lost.”

In their discouragement, they only see their need and do not measure the consequences of what they are doing. They do not think that to surrender to Holofernes and to acknowledge Nebuchadnezzar as God is to disown God. All they see is that it is better to live as slaves than to die.

“I do not get anything by asking; God will not listen to me,” is what we usually hear disheartened people say, as the people of Bethulia did. This discouragement is especially contagious when it comes from the father of the family.

young people and children – gathered and accused Uzziah and the leaders of the town.

They called out with loud cries and said before all the elders, <sup>24</sup>“May God judge between you and us, for you are the cause of this misfortune by not engaging in peaceful negotiations with the Assyrians. <sup>25</sup>And now there is no one who can bring us any help; God has delivered us into the hands of these pagans in such a way that we lie dying before them from great thirst and misery. <sup>26</sup>You must call on the Assyrians and let the whole army of Holofernes pillage us. <sup>27</sup>It is better for us to become their booty, for then we shall become slaves, but at least we shall live and not have to see our women, our older children and the little ones die before our eyes. <sup>28</sup>We urge you by heaven and earth and by our God, the Lord of our ancestors, who punishes us according to our sins and the sins of our fathers: make this decision this very day.”

<sup>29</sup>Altogether they raised a great lamentation in the midst of the assembly, and they cried out with a loud voice to the Lord God.

<sup>30</sup>Then Uzziah said to them, “Have confidence, my brothers; hold out for five days more, during which time the Lord our God will show us his mercy, for he will not abandon us forever. <sup>31</sup>If these days pass without his coming to our help, then we shall do what you say.” <sup>32</sup>Then he dismissed the men, each to his post, and they went towards the ramparts and the towers of the town, and he sent the women and children back to their homes. Now there

was a great depression throughout the town.

**8**<sup>1</sup>The news of what had happened came in those days to Judith, daughter of Merari, son of Joseph, of Oziel, of Elkhiah, of Ananias, of Gideon, of Raphain, of Ahitub, of Elijah, of Hilkhiah, of Eliab, of Nathanael, of Salamiel, of Sarasadai, of Israel. <sup>2</sup>Her husband was Manasseh, of the same tribe and family. He had died during the harvesting of the barley <sup>3</sup>as he was supervising the reapers who were binding the sheaves on the plain; he suffered sunstroke, took to his bed and died in Bethulia, his town. He was buried with his ancestors in the field which lies between Dothan and Balamon.

#### **Judith: the Jewess who never wavered in her faith**

• <sup>4</sup>As a widow, Judith remained in her house for three years and four months. <sup>5</sup>She had built a room on the rooftop of the house where she lived. <sup>6</sup>She covered herself in sackcloth, put on widow’s garments and fasted all the days of her widowhood with the exception of the eves of the Sabbath, the Sabbath day, the eves of the new moons, the days of the new moons, and all the celebrations of the people of Israel. <sup>7</sup>She was exceedingly beautiful and very pleasing to look at. Manasseh, her husband, had left her gold, silver, servants, cattle and fields and she remained the owner of all this estate. <sup>8</sup>No one could say anything evil of her because she greatly feared God.

<sup>9</sup>She heard of the threatening words which the people had addressed to their leaders because they were downcast, suffering from lack of water. Judith also heard all that Uzziah had promised in reply, how he had sworn to

• **8.4** The Lord achieves his plans through the humble; he reveals his plans to the little ones and the humble (Mt 11:25-30). We can observe the Lord’s way of doing things throughout the Bible: for example, his choosing David (1 S 16) and something similar in 1 Mac 3:18-22. In spite of her wealth, Judith is an insignificant woman before Holofernes’ military power.

*Who are you to put God to the test?* Faithfulness to God stands out in Judith’s speech to the leaders of the city. She reproaches them for

wanting to put time limits on God to fulfill their human plans. Today many Christians do the same with their gifts, when they wish to force God to grant them a specific favor.

*If the enemies capture us... the whole of Judea will be taken.* Those with problems must think not only of their own interest but also of other people’s. Judith forces them to think about the rest of the nation and not only about their city, Bethulia. National solidarity compels them to resist.

2K  
4:18

1K  
21:2  
2K  
4:1

Es  
2:7

Dn  
13:2

Ex  
14:12

Ex  
20:5

hand over their city to the Assyrians at the end of five days. <sup>10</sup> So she sent the maidservant who looked after her affairs, to call Chabris and Charmis, two elders of the town, to come and see her. <sup>11</sup> They came to her house and she said to them, "Listen to me, you elders of Bethulia, for the words which you have spoken in front of the people today are not right. You did wrong to take an oath between God and yourselves, and to say that you would hand over the town to our enemies if, within a certain number of days, the Lord does not come to your help. <sup>12</sup> Who are you to put God to the test and take God's place when you answered the people? <sup>13</sup> That is not the way to call for his mercy, but rather, one that leads to his wrath. <sup>14</sup> For if you cannot probe the depths of the human heart nor know what a man is thinking, how can you understand the God who has made all things? Do you know his mind or understand his thoughts? No, my brothers, do not annoy the Lord our God. <sup>15</sup> For if he does not wish to come to our help within these five days, he has the power to protect us for as many days as he wishes or else to annihilate us in front of our enemies.

<sup>16</sup> As for yourselves, do not challenge the designs of the Lord our God, for God cannot give in to threats as humans do, nor can any decision be imposed upon him as it can on a mere mortal. <sup>17</sup> That is why, while waiting patiently for him to save us, let us beg him to come to our help. He will listen to our plea, if it pleases him. <sup>18</sup> For it has not happened in our generation nor is there among us today any tribe or family or people or city that worships gods made by human hands, as happened in days past. <sup>19</sup> It was for that reason that our ancestors were handed over to be slain by the sword and pillaged, and that they suffered great disaster at the hands of their enemies. <sup>20</sup> But we do not recognize any other god than the One

God, therefore let us hope that he will not look with contempt on us or on any of our race.

<sup>21</sup> If the enemies capture us, so in the same way, the whole of Judea will be taken; our Sanctuary will be pillaged and we will answer for its profanation with our blood. <sup>22</sup> God will bring upon our heads the murder of our brothers, the bondage of our country and the devastation of our heritage. Wherever among the nations we shall be slaves, we shall be maltreated by those to whom we belong. <sup>23</sup> Our enslavement will not be changed in our favor, but the Lord our God will turn it into dishonor. <sup>24</sup> Now, my brothers, let us show our fellow countrymen that their lives depend on ours; that the safety of the Sanctuary, the Temple and the Altar rests with us.

<sup>25</sup> Much more, let us thank the Lord our God who is putting us to the test as he did our ancestors. <sup>26</sup> Remember what he did with Abraham, all the trials to which he subjected Isaac and all those that happened to Jacob in Mesopotamia of Syria where he looked after the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother. <sup>27</sup> Is not God making us pass through fire as he did the others to prove their hearts? The Lord is not punishing us, but he scourges those who draw near to him in order to admonish them."

<sup>28</sup> Uzziah said to her, "All that you have said has been said with wisdom and no one can contradict your words. <sup>29</sup> In fact it is not just today that your wisdom is evident, but ever since your early days all the people have recognized your intelligence and the natural goodness of your heart. <sup>30</sup> But the people were suffering great thirst so they forced us to carry out what we have said, and they have charged us with an oath which we cannot break. <sup>31</sup> Since you are a devout woman, pray for us that the Lord will send rain to fill our reservoirs and we shall no longer be exhausted."

<sup>32</sup> Judith said to them, "Listen to me, I will do something which will be handed down from generation to generation of the children of our race. <sup>33</sup> Tonight you will stand at the

Is  
40:18  
Ps  
139:  
16-  
17

Dn  
3:17

1Mac  
3:20



gate of the town and I will go out with my maidservant and, by the end of the time which has been fixed for you to hand over the town to our enemies, the Lord will visit Israel through my hand. <sup>34</sup>But do not try to find out what I shall do for I will not tell you, until I have fulfilled what I will do.”

<sup>35</sup>Then Uziah and the leaders said to her, “Go in peace and may the Lord our God go before you so that you may take vengeance upon our enemies.” <sup>36</sup>Then, leaving Judith’s room, they went back to their posts.

<sup>Dn</sup> <sup>9:21</sup> **9** <sup>1</sup>Judith knelt and bowed her head to the ground, put ashes on her head and uncovered the sackcloth with which she was clothed. At precisely the same moment as incense was being offered in the House of God at Jerusalem, Judith invoked aloud the Lord God, she said, <sup>2</sup>“Lord, God of my father Simeon, you placed a sword in his hand to punish the foreigners who did violence to a young girl. For they had abused her, uncovering her body to shame her and violating her womb to dishonor her. They did this though you said: This shall not be done. <sup>3</sup>Because of this you handed over their leaders to be slain and their bed, reddened because of their deceit, was left red with their blood. You struck down the slaves with their leaders and the leaders themselves with their servants. <sup>4</sup>You handed over their women to rape, their daughters to slavery and all their possessions to be shared among your favored sons who were filled with horror at this defilement of their blood and invoked your help.

<sup>5</sup>O God, my God, listen to me, a widow! It is you who made all things past, what is present and what is yet to come. It is you who consider things present and to come. Those things which you decided have been realized. <sup>6</sup>The things you have planned have presented themselves saying: Here we are. In truth, all your ways are prepared and your decision is known from the beginning of time.

<sup>7</sup>Therefore see what a great multitude these Assyrians make with their army, how they pride themselves on their horses and their cavalymen. They have placed great pride in the strength of their foot soldiers and their trust in their shields, javelins, bows and arrows. <sup>8</sup>But they do not recognize that you, Lord, decide the outcome of wars. Lord is your name; wipe out their force with your power, and in your anger overthrow their superiority; for they intend to profane your Sanctuary, to defile your Tabernacle where your glorious Name resides, to overturn by force the horn of your Altar.

<sup>9</sup>Consider their pride, let your anger fall on their heads and give to my hands, the hands of a widow, the strength necessary for what I have decided. <sup>10</sup>By my lying lips punish the

slave with his master and the master with his servant; put an end to their arrogance by the hand of a woman.

<sup>11</sup>Truly your strength is not in number nor your power in strong men for you are a God of the humble, the defender of the little ones, the support of the weak, the protector of the abandoned, the savior of those in despair.

<sup>12</sup>Yes, God of my fathers and God of the heritage of Israel, Ruler of the heavens and the earth, Creator of the waters, King of all creation, listen to my prayer.

<sup>13</sup>Give me tempting words to wound and kill those who have conceived cruel designs against your Covenant, your consecrated House, Mount Zion and the House which belongs to your children.

<sup>14</sup>Make the nation and all the tribes know that you are God, all-powerful and strong, and that, apart from you, there is no other protector for the people of Israel.”

#### The exploits of Judith

**10** <sup>1</sup>When Judith had finished her prayer to the God of Israel, <sup>2</sup>she rose from the ground, and after calling her maidservant, she went down into the house where she usually spent the sabbath days and the feasts. <sup>3</sup>She took off the sackcloth and her widow’s clothes in which she was dressed. She washed her whole body with water, anointed it with rich perfume, combed her hair and placed a jewelled band around it. She dressed herself in the beautiful garments she had been accustomed to wear when her husband, Manasseh, was living. <sup>4</sup>She put sandals on her feet, put on her anklets, bracelets and rings, her earrings and all her jewels. She made herself extremely beautiful in order to attract the attention of the men who would see her.

<sup>5</sup>She gave the servant a skin of wine and a jar of oil, she filled a bag with flour made from barley and some small cakes made from dried figs and fine flour. She wrapped up all these things and put the maid in charge of them. <sup>6</sup>Then they set out in the direction of the gate of the town of Bethulia where they found stationed Uziah and the elders of the town, Chabris and Charmis.

<sup>7</sup>As soon as the men saw her, her face so transformed and her clothes so different, they were full of admiration for her beauty and said to her, <sup>8</sup>“May the God of our fathers grant that you may find favor and that your undertakings may be successful for the glory of the sons of Israel and the exaltation of Jerusalem.”

She adored God and said to them, <sup>9</sup>“Command that the gate of the town be opened for me and I will go forth in order to accomplish what you have just said.” They ordered the young men to open the gate as she had

Jdg  
4:9

Gen  
38:14  
Ru  
3:3

Is  
3:18  
Es  
15:1

<sup>2Mac</sup>  
7:35-  
36



asked. <sup>10</sup>They carried out the command and Judith went out with her maidservant.

The townsmen watched her until she reached the foot of the mountain and crossed the valley, then they lost sight of her. <sup>11</sup>Judith and the maid walked straight through the valley and a sentry for the Assyrians came to meet them. <sup>12</sup>He stopped them and asked, "Who are you? Where have you come from? Where are you going?" She replied, "I am a daughter of the Hebrews; I am fleeing far from them because they are on the point of handing themselves over to be despoiled by you. <sup>13</sup>I have come to present myself to Holofernes, the general-in-chief of your army, to speak to him in all sincerity. I will show him a way by which he can advance and become master of the whole mountain without losing a single man either from injury or loss of life."

<sup>14</sup>As soon as the men had heard her words and noticed her face (for she was strikingly beautiful) they said to her, <sup>15</sup>"You have saved your life by hurrying to present yourself before our lord. Approach his tent; certain men from among us will accompany you until they have handed you over safely into his hands. <sup>16</sup>When you stand before him, do not have any fear in your heart, but tell him what you have to say and he will treat you well."

<sup>17</sup>They chose one hundred men from their number; these men accompanied Judith and the maid and led them to the tent of Holofernes. <sup>18</sup>In the whole camp the news of her arrival spread from tent to tent, and throughout the whole camp men came running. They made a circle round her as she stood waiting outside Holofernes' tent while someone informed him of her arrival. <sup>19</sup>They were captivated by her beauty and, on seeing her, they praised the sons of Israel and said to one another, "Who can look down on the people who have such women? It would be a mistake to leave one man alive; they would be able to deceive the whole world."

<sup>20</sup>Those who were sleeping near Holofernes and all his officers came out and led her into the tent. <sup>21</sup>Holofernes was lying on his bed under hangings of purple and gold set with emerald and precious stones. <sup>22</sup>Having been informed about her, he moved towards the entrance of the tent, with silver lamps carried before him. <sup>23</sup>As Judith came before him and his officers, they all admired the beauty of her face. Throwing herself face downwards to the ground, she bowed before him; the servants of Holofernes raised her up.

Ru 3:11 **11** <sup>1</sup>Holofernes said to Judith, "Have confidence, woman, have no fear in your heart, I do not harm any person who has chosen to serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of all the earth. <sup>2</sup>And, if those of your people who dwell on the mountain had not ignored me, I

should not have raised my sword against them; but they have brought this upon themselves. <sup>3</sup>Now, tell me why you have fled from their midst and have come to us. Are you doing this to save yourself? Have confidence, your life is safe tonight and also in the future. <sup>4</sup>No one will harm you, you will be well-treated as are all the servants of my lord, King Nebuchadnezzar."

<sup>5</sup>Judith replied, "Listen to the words of your servant, so that I may speak freely in your presence and I will not lie to my lord tonight. <sup>6</sup>And if you follow the advice of your servant, everything will be accomplished by the hand of God and my lord will not fail in his undertakings. <sup>7</sup>For just as truly as Nebuchadnezzar is king of all the earth and his presence is felt, and he has sent you for the correction of others, it is thanks to your power that not only do men serve him but also wild beasts, animals and the birds of the air live for Nebuchadnezzar and all his house.

<sup>8</sup>We have heard of your wisdom and prudence of mind and it is said throughout the world that you alone are the bravest man in the kingdom, powerful because of your knowledge and outstanding in military strategy. <sup>9</sup>We have heard about the discourse delivered in your council by Achior, and of its terms, because the men of Bethulia took him in and he reported to them all that he had said in your presence. <sup>10</sup>Now all-powerful lord, do not dismiss what he said but keep it in mind because it is true. Our nation will never be punished nor the sword used against it unless its people sin against their God. <sup>11</sup>Yet my lord will not be driven back and fail. Death will overtake them, for they have fallen into the sin that arouses the anger of God every time they commit it. <sup>12</sup>As a result of the shortage of food and water, they have decided to lay hands on their animals. They have resolved to eat those things which God in his laws forbade them to eat, including the first fruits of the harvest and the tithes of wine and oil which, after their consecration, had been put aside for the priests who minister before the face of our God in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>They have decided to consume these things completely, although it is not lawful for any of the people even to touch them with their hands. <sup>14</sup>They have sent messengers to Jerusalem – for those who dwell there have also done this – and they have charged these men to bring back this permission from the Council of the Elders. <sup>15</sup>Now it will come to pass that when this permission arrives and the people will have acted upon it, on that same day they will be delivered over to you for their destruction. <sup>16</sup>That is why I, your servant, having understood all this, have fled far from them. God has sent me to bring about, along with you, deeds that will strike terror throughout

Dn 2:38

Wis 8:15

Lev 26:6  
2Mac 8:36

Lev 22:10

the whole world and cause those who hear them to talk. <sup>17</sup>For your servant is a pious woman who serves God night and day. From now on I will remain near you, my lord. Each evening I will go out towards the ravine and I will pray to God and he will tell me when they have fallen into sin. <sup>18</sup>Then I will report this to you, so that you will go forth with your whole army and there will be no man able to withstand you. <sup>19</sup>Then I will lead you through Judea until I arrive in Jerusalem where I will set up your tent. You will lead them like sheep without a shepherd and not one dog will growl at you. I have been given a premonition of these things. It has been revealed to me, and I have been sent to make it known to you.”

Num  
27:17  
1K  
22:17

<sup>20</sup>Her words pleased Holofernes and all his officers. They admired her wisdom and said, <sup>21</sup>“From one end of the earth to the other there is no woman like her for the beauty of her face and the wisdom of her words.” <sup>22</sup>Holofernes said to her, “God has done well to send you ahead of this people to show them that the power is in my hands and that destruction is the fate of those who despised my lord. <sup>23</sup>You are beautiful to look at and prudent in your words: if you do as you have said, your God shall be my God and you will live in the house of King Nebuchadnezzar, and be famous throughout all the world.”

Ru  
1:16

**12** <sup>1</sup>Then Holofernes had her brought into the place where his silver dishes were laid out and commanded them to serve her from his food and to give her his wine to drink.

Dn  
1:8

<sup>2</sup>But Judith said, “I will not eat it for fear that it might be the occasion of my downfall. What I have brought with me is sufficient.” <sup>3</sup>Holofernes said to her, “When you have finished the things that you have brought, where will we be able to get the same kind of food to give you, for there is no one of your race here?” <sup>4</sup>Judith said to him, “As your soul lives my lord, your servant will not have finished what I have brought with me before the Lord will have carried out by my hand what he has decided to do.”

Ex  
14:24

<sup>5</sup>Then the officers of Holofernes led her to the tent and she slept until midnight. She arose at the morning watch <sup>6</sup>and sent a message to Holofernes, “Will my lord command that his servant be allowed to go out to pray.” <sup>7</sup>Holofernes ordered his bodyguards not to prevent her from doing so.

She remained in the camp three days. Each night she went to the ravine of Bethulia and bathed herself in the spring which was in the camp. <sup>8</sup>When she returned to the tent, she prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel, that he

would guide her steps in the right path to bring about the release of her people; <sup>9</sup>and now purified, once she had returned, she remained in the tent until she took her food towards evening.

### In the tent of Holofernes

• <sup>10</sup>Then on the fourth day, Holofernes gave a banquet for his personal servants without sending invitations to any of his officers. <sup>11</sup>He said to the eunuch Bagoas who looked after his affairs, “Go and persuade this Hebrew woman who is under your care to come eat and drink with us, <sup>12</sup>for it would be a disgrace if we allowed such a woman to depart without having enjoyed her company. If we are not able to allure her, she will laugh at us.”

<sup>13</sup>So Bagoas left Holofernes and entered Judith’s tent, and said to her, “Will this beautiful slave not hesitate to come to my lord’s tent to be honored in his presence, merrily to drink wine with us and to become this very day like an Assyrian woman who dwells in the house of Nebuchadnezzar?” <sup>14</sup>Judith said to him, “Who am I to go against the wishes of my Lord? All that pleases him I will hasten to do and that will be for me a joy until the day of my death.”

Es  
5:1

<sup>15</sup>Then she arose; she dressed in her beautiful garments and all the finery of a woman. Her servant went and spread on the ground, in front of Holofernes, the fleece which Judith had received from Bagoas for her daily use so that she could recline on it while she ate.

<sup>16</sup>So Judith entered the tent and took her place. The heart of Holofernes was ravished by her beauty, his whole being was captivated and he had a passionate desire to possess her. Ever since the first day he had seen her, he had been waiting for an occasion to seduce her. <sup>17</sup>Holofernes said to her: “Drink and share our happiness.”

<sup>18</sup>Judith said, “I will drink then, my

• **12.10** In the dialogue between Judith and Holofernes, note how Judith says “my Lord” giving these words a double meaning. She does

not lie, but she speaks in such a way that Holofernes takes it for himself meanwhile Judith means her Lord.

lord, because today my life has become more precious to me than on any other day since my birth.”<sup>19</sup> She took what her servant had prepared for her and ate and drank in front of him.<sup>20</sup> Holofernes was bewitched by her and he drank a great quantity of wine, much more than he had ever drunk on any single day since his birth.

#### God works marvels

**13**<sup>\*</sup> <sup>1</sup>When it was late, the servants hurried away. Bagoas dismissed from the presence of his master those who were standing around, and closed the tent from the outside. All the men hurried to bed for they were tired from having drunk too much.<sup>2</sup> So Judith was left alone in the tent with Holofernes who, sodden with wine, had collapsed onto the bed.<sup>3</sup> Judith told her servant to stand outside the room and watch for her coming out because she would go out to pray, as she did each day. She also spoke to Bagoas in much the same way.

<sup>4</sup>Everyone left the tent of Holofernes, not one – small or great – remained in the room. Judith, then, stood by Holofernes’ bed and prayed in her heart, “Lord God all-powerful, help me now in what I will do for the glory of Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> For now is the time to support the cause of your people and to ensure that my undertaking brings about the ruin of the enemies who are drawn up against us.”

<sup>6</sup>Then she moved towards the bedpost near Holofernes’ head and took down the sword and, <sup>7</sup>approaching the bed, she seized the hair of his head saying, “O Lord God of Israel, give me strength, this very moment!”<sup>8</sup> Then with all her strength she struck his neck twice and cut off his head.<sup>9</sup> She then rolled his body from the bed and took off the hangings from the columns. Then she went out at once and gave the head of Holofernes to her servant <sup>10</sup>who put it in the bag in which she carried the food. Then they went out together as they used to do for prayer. After they had crossed the camp, they passed round the edge of the ravine, climbed the mountain to Bethulia and reached the gates of the town.

<sup>11</sup>Judith called from a distance to those who were keeping guard at the gates, “Open, open the gates! God, our God, is with us! Today he has once again worked a miracle in Israel and exerted his power against our enemies.”<sup>12</sup> As soon as the townsfolk heard her voice, they called the elders and hurried down to the gates of the town.<sup>13</sup> They all ran together, from the smallest to the greatest, for they were waiting for her return. They opened the gates and welcomed the two women; then, having lighted a fire so as to see them, they gathered around the two.<sup>14</sup> She said to them in a loud voice, “Praise God, praise him! Praise God who has not withheld his mercy from

Ps  
66:20

• **13.1** The whole account that follows emphasizes the vigilant love of God who intervenes when it is necessary and who safely conducts our enterprises, even those apparently doomed to failure when we risk everything to save our brothers and sisters. In this sense it is true. We shall note however, that the trickery of Judith and the incredible rout of the Assyrians after the death of Holofernes are a dream of childish powerlessness. The account was composed after the time of the Maccabees from the memories of a crushed people, unable to resist the oppressor; it originated in the migrant Jewish communities who had lost their taste and capability for an armed struggle. The old dream of a magic resource rises again; here we have a

miraculous intervention of God capable of overturning all situations and crushing evil forever.

Here it is easy to see a mixture of the human and the divine: limitless trust in God and the fabulous dreams of a child. Here once more the cross of Jesus and his resurrection, so strong and so discreet, will keep us within reality.

The account rings true however when the triumph of Judith makes little of the prestige and venerability of men, elders or priests, who pass for the leaders of God’s people. It is an act of reparation in favor of women in a thoroughly macho society: God has no thought for these alleged valiant or honored men; all they have to do is applaud an untitled woman.

the House of Israel. This very night he has crushed our enemies by my hand.”

<sup>Jdg 4:9</sup> <sup>2Mac 15:32</sup> <sup>15</sup> And, taking out the head of Holofernes from the bag, she showed it to them saying, “Here is the head of Holofernes, general-in-chief of the Assyrian army, and here are the hangings under which he was lying in his drunkenness. The Lord has struck him down by the hand of a woman. <sup>16</sup> As truly as the Lord lives, it was my face that seduced him to his undoing, but the Lord has protected me. This man could not sin with me to disgrace or dishonor me.” <sup>17</sup> All the people were greatly amazed, so they bowed down and worshiped God, saying with one voice, “Blessed are you, our God, who today have crushed the enemies of your people.”

#### **Blessed are you among all women**

<sup>Gen 14:19</sup> <sup>Jdg 5:24</sup> <sup>Lk 1:42</sup> • <sup>18</sup> Uziah said to her, “My daughter, may the Most High God bless you more than all women on earth.

And blessed be the Lord God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has led you to behead the leader of our enemies.

<sup>19</sup> Never will people forget the confidence you have shown; they will always remember the power of God.

<sup>1Mac 13:5</sup> <sup>Mt 26:13</sup> <sup>Lk 1:48</sup> <sup>20</sup> May God ensure your everlasting glory, and may he reward and bless you for you have risked your life when your race was humiliated.

You chose instead to do the best before God in order to prevent our downfall.”

And all the people said, “Amen! Amen!”

<sup>2Mac 15:33</sup> **14** <sup>1</sup> Judith said to them, “Listen, my brothers, take this head and hang it from the battlements of our rampart, <sup>2</sup> then

when dawn breaks and the sun rises over the earth, let each of you take his weapons and let all those able to fight go outside the town. And under the command of a captain, proceed as if you were about to go down into the plain in the direction of the Assyrian outposts, but you will not descend. <sup>3</sup> The Assyrian guards will seize their arms, and go towards their camp to awaken the generals of the Assyrian army. These officers will run to the tent of Holofernes but will not find him; fear will then come upon them and they will flee from you. <sup>4</sup> Then you and all those who dwell in the land of Israel will follow them and strike them down as they go. <sup>5</sup> But, before you do this, call Achior the Ammonite so that he may see and recognize the one who despised the people of Israel, the man who sent him to you as to his death.”

<sup>6</sup> Achior was brought from the house of Uziah. As soon as he arrived and saw the head of Holofernes in the hand of one of the people, he fainted and fell face down on the ground. <sup>7</sup> When they had lifted him up, he threw himself at the feet of Judith, bowed before her and said, “May you be blessed throughout Judea and among all the nations, who on hearing your name will be amazed. <sup>8</sup> But now, tell me all that you did during these days.”

Standing in the midst of the people, Judith told him all that she had done from the day she set out until the moment in which she was now speaking to them. <sup>9</sup> When she had finished talking, the people cried out with great joy, and this was heard throughout the town. <sup>10</sup> When Achior saw all that the God of Israel had done, he immediately believed in him. He was circumcised and became a member of the community of Israel down to this day.

<sup>11</sup> When the sun had risen and they had hung Holofernes’ head on the rampart, all the men took their arms and went out in groups to the mountain slopes. <sup>12</sup> As soon as the Assyrians saw them, they warned their commanders. These men, in turn, went to inform the generals, the captains and all their officers. <sup>13</sup> Then they all went to the tent of Holofernes and said to the steward in charge of his affairs, “Waken our Lord, for the slaves plan to come down and fight against us to their utter destruction. <sup>14</sup> So Bagoas drew back the curtain and knocked, thinking that Holofernes was sleeping with Judith. <sup>15</sup> As no one answered, he entered the room, and found Holofernes lying across the wooden

Ex  
15:16

• 18. *May the Most High God bless you more than all women on earth.* Luke will remember these words and will adapt them for Mary (Lk 1:42). With Luke we easily see in Judith’s victory the image of another victory in which Mary “crushed the head of the serpent” in

perfectly welcoming the Son of God and his patient work to redeem the world from the Devil’s hands, as the Bible had announced (Gen 3:15). The hymn we refer to: *You are the glory of Israel* speaks more truly of Mary than of Judith.



footstool dead with his head cut off. <sup>16</sup>He cried out with a loud voice and tore his clothes. <sup>17</sup>He entered the tent where Judith had stayed but did not find her. Then he rushed out to the troops, shouting, <sup>18</sup>“The slaves have deceived us! One Hebrew woman has put to shame the army of King Nebuchadnezzar, for Holofernes lies dead on the ground. <sup>19</sup>When the officers of the Assyrian army heard these words, they were greatly distressed. They tore their garments and cried out with a loud voice in their camp.

**15** <sup>1</sup>When those who were in the camp heard the cries, they were astounded. <sup>2</sup>Terror and fear fell on them, they no longer controlled themselves but at the same moment they all broke rank and fled by way of the roads across the plain and the mountain. <sup>3</sup>Those who were encamped in the mountains around Bethulia also began to flee. Then the men of Israel, all among them who were capable of fighting, fell on them. <sup>4</sup>Uzziah sent messengers to Betomasthaim, Choba, Kona, and throughout the land of Israel, to announce what had happened and to invite them all to fall upon the enemy and destroy them. <sup>5</sup>When the men of Israel heard this, they threw themselves on the enemy and pursued them as far as Choba. Even those from Jerusalem came, as well as those from all the mountainous region, because they were told what had happened in the camp of their enemies. Those from Gilead and from Galilee caught them on the flank and struck great blows against them until they reached Damascus and its surrounding territory. <sup>6</sup>As for the inhabitants of Bethulia who remained behind, they rushed into the Assyrian camp, pillaged it and thereby greatly enriched themselves. <sup>7</sup>Once they returned from the carnage, the Israelite men took possession of what remained. Also the people from the villages and farms in the mountains and on the plains seized great booty because there was plenty that they could get.

<sup>2K</sup>  
<sup>7:16</sup>  
<sup>1Mac</sup>  
<sup>7:46</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Then the high priest Joakim and the council of the Elders of Israel in Jerusalem came to hear the good things which the Lord had done for Israel, and to see Judith and congratulate her. <sup>9</sup>As soon as they had approached her they blessed her all together and said,

“You are the pride and joy of Jerusalem! You are the glory of Israel. You are the honor of our people.

<sup>10</sup>You alone have accomplished all

this. You have done great things for Israel and God has blessed your work. May the almighty Lord bless you forever.”

And all the people said, “Amen!”

<sup>11</sup>All the people pillaged the camp for thirty days. They gave Holofernes’ tent to Judith, with all his silver, his beds, his drinking vessels and all his furniture. She took them, and after harnessing her mule, she prepared her chariots and piled up all these goods in them.

<sup>12</sup>All the Israelite women also ran out to see her, they blessed her and a number of them formed a choir in her honor. She took olive branches in her hand and gave some to the women who accompanied her. <sup>13</sup>She and the women with her made crowns of olive leaves. Then she went ahead of the people, leading the women in dance. All the Israelite men followed, clad in their armor, carrying crowns and loudly chanting hymns. <sup>14</sup>Then Judith intoned this hymn of thanksgiving and the entire people of Israel echoed this praise.

#### The song of Judith

**16** <sup>1</sup>Judith said, “Sing a song to my God with tambourines,  
sing in honor of God with cymbals.  
Compose for him a psalm of praise.  
Exalt and bless his Name!

<sup>2</sup>The Lord is truly a God who crushes war,  
who encamps in the midst of his people  
for he has snatched me from the hand of  
those who pursued me.

<sup>3</sup>The Assyrian came from the mountains  
of the north.

He came with the myriads of his army,  
his soldiers have filled the torrents  
and his cavalry covered the hills.

<sup>4</sup>He wanted to burn my land,  
to kill the young men by the sword,  
to destroy my children at the breast,  
to hand over my little ones to slaughter  
and to rape my young maidens.

<sup>5</sup>The Lord Almighty has driven them back  
by the hand of a woman.

<sup>6</sup>Their hero has not been overcome by  
young warriors;

he was not struck down by the sons of the  
Titans,  
or laid low by any great giants.  
But it is Judith, the daughter of Merari,  
who by the beauty of her face has defeated  
him.

For the relief of the oppressed in Israel  
<sup>7</sup>she took off her widow’s robes,

anointed her face with perfume,  
<sup>8</sup>put a jewelled band around her hair,  
and put on a linen dress in order to seduce  
him.

<sup>9</sup> Her sandals delighted his eyes,  
her beauty captivated his soul,  
and the scimitar cut through his neck.

<sup>10</sup> The Persians trembled with fear at her  
boldness,

and the Medes were upset by her daring.

<sup>11</sup> Then my oppressed people shouted for  
joy;

my weak ones cried out,

the enemy was terrified;

they raised their voices; the enemy took to  
flight.

<sup>12</sup> The children of young women pierced  
them through and struck them down like  
fugitives,

and so the enemy perished in a battle  
arranged by God.

<sup>13</sup> I will sing to my God a new song:

Lord, you are great and glorious,

wonderfully strong, invincible!

<sup>14</sup> May the whole of your creation serve  
you,

for you spoke and all things were,

you sent forth your spirit and all things  
came into being:

No one can resist your voice.

<sup>15</sup> For the mountains with the waters will be  
shaken to their foundations,

the rocks will melt like wax before you,

but to those who fear you

you will always show mercy.

<sup>16</sup> The fragrance of any sacrifice is little to  
please you

and the holocausts of fatted animals

are as nothing before you,

but he who fears the Lord is forever  
great.

<sup>17</sup> Woe to the nations which rise up against  
my people:

The Lord Almighty will punish them in the  
day of judgment,

with fire and worms under their skin,

and they will keep on weeping, suffering  
forever."

<sup>18</sup> When they arrived in Jerusalem, they  
worshiped God and, when the people had  
been purified, they presented their holo-  
causts, freewill offerings and gifts. <sup>19</sup> Then  
Judith offered all of Holofernes' belongings  
which the people had given her and she  
dedicated to the Lord the hangings from his  
room which she herself had taken. <sup>20</sup> So the  
people remained in Jerusalem, rejoicing be-  
fore the Sanctuary for three months and  
Judith stayed with them.

<sup>21</sup> After these days were over, each one  
returned to his own house. Judith returned to  
Bethulia and devoted herself to her house-  
hold. During her lifetime she was famous  
throughout the land.

<sup>22</sup> Though many desired to marry her, she  
had no relation with any man since the death  
and burial of Manasseh, her husband.

<sup>23</sup> She spent her old age in the house of her  
husband. And she set her maidservant free.  
She died in Bethulia at the age of a hundred  
and five and was buried in the grave of  
Manasseh, her husband. <sup>24</sup> All Israel  
mourned for her for seven days. Before her  
death she had divided her property among  
the relatives of her husband, Manasseh, and  
those of her own family.

<sup>25</sup> No one again threatened the people of  
Israel while Judith lived, nor for a very long  
time after her death.