

Week Thirty-Six

Days 246-252



Exile Narrative: Jeremiah 32—44 | Supplemental: Judith 1—16; Proverbs 16:25—17:20

VIRTUES ARE NURTURED, FAITHFULNESS IS SPAWNED



Judith with the Head of Holofernes
by Cristofano Allori

Many of the passages in Proverbs teach that we must develop virtue so our hearts and emotions respond more easily to God's will. This lesson is particularly important for helping us to understand the role of patience, love, and devotion to God in trying times that Jeremiah and Judith exhibit. In each case, faithfulness comes from the virtues both of these figures nurtured.

- In the book of Jeremiah, we return to King Zedekiah. Remember, this book is not chronological; its narrative skips back and forth a bit.
- We see different instances of Jeremiah correctly prophesying the fall of Judah as well as the rejection of God's words by the leaders and the people.
- Despite persecution, such as being thrown in prison during the siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah also foretells restoration. In Jeremiah 33, for example, the Lord promises to multiply the Levitical priests. Over the past two thousand years, the Church has not ceased to offer up the Sacrifice of the Mass every day. This is the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy.
- Jeremiah warns the remaining people not to flee to Egypt, but they reject his counsel and force him to go with them.
- In Egypt, the Israelites immediately fall back into idolatry. They worship Ishtar, a pagan goddess of fertility.
- Ishtar was sometimes called the "queen of heaven." Catholics refer to Mary as the Queen of Heaven, but we do not worship Mary as a goddess. She is the Queen of heaven and earth because she is the Mother of Jesus, who is King of heaven and earth.
- Both Judith and Mary are women through whom God does extraordinary things to save his people. Both praise the Lord for his saving acts, not taking praise for themselves.
- Judith is not only beautiful but also virtuous, prudent, discerning in judgment, and courageous.
- She shows courage most dramatically when she beheads the enemy military leader and instructs the Israelite soldiers on how to proceed against the Assyrians.

Dive Deeper

In your journey through the Bible, have there been difficult passages that you are tempted to dismiss? If so, ask for God's grace today to help you accept his Word and live it out.

Bible Answers

Is the book of Judith historical?

While it references events, the book of Judith is more story than history. It conveys that God can use everyone to fulfill his will, regardless of one's place in society or other factors.

Judith's story occurs in Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's twelfth year of ruthless reign. Judith, a beautiful widow, enters in chapter 8 as the person God will use to deliver his people. Aware of evil threats by General Holofernes, she meets the drunken soldier, captivates him, and then slays him for acts against her people. She returns home popular.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* lists Judith among the Old Testament women who prepare for the mission of the Virgin Mary as an intercessor and advocate for God's People (see CCC 489).



FALSE GODDESS

Jeremiah 44 denounces the persistent idolatry of God's People. These clay figurines depict Asherah or Ishtar, most likely the so-called "queen of heaven" mentioned by the prophet.



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