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# Study Questions for the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*

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## The Book of Judith

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## Study Questions

### Judith

#### Chapter 1

##### *For understanding*

- 1:1. Who is the Nebuchadnezzar mentioned in the story usually thought to be, and when did he reign? What problem does this identification pose? What three explanations for this historical discrepancy have been proposed? What is the city of Nineveh, and when was it destroyed? Given the setting of the Book of Judith after 515 B.C., what is it possible that the author is doing? Who is Arphaxad? Where is Ecbatana?
- 1:2. What does history know of the fortifications at Ecbatana? What is the purpose of the detailed description in 1:2–4? If the mighty fortress of Ecbatana could not withstand the king's forces, what could the small town of Bethulia expect? How long is a cubit?
- 1:8. Where are Carmel, Gilead, and Galilee? What does the fertile Esdraelon valley form? Of what Hebrew name is Esdraelon a Greek spelling?
- 1:12. Where are Moab and Ammon? To what might "two seas" possibly refer?

##### *For application*

- 1:1–4. The three traditional enemies of the human spirit are the world, the flesh, and the devil. In your experience, which do you think is the most powerful? Which seems most unstoppable? Which causes the most destruction? What defenses can you build against such an enemy?
- 1:5. Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar is making war against King Arphaxad? According to CCC 2317, what are some of the reasons why nations wage war, and how can the threat of violence be vanquished? What is the *root cause* of war implied in this explanation?

#### Chapter 2

##### *For understanding*

- 2:1. What is the "eighteenth year" referred to in the text? Why might the timing be mentioned? In the Latin Vulgate, when does the king reveal his plans? What is the "first month", and to what does it correspond? What day is Nisan 22?
- 2:4. What kind of name is Holofernes? As commander of the Assyrian forces, what will his role be?
- 2:12. What kind of formula is "as I live"? How did ancient Jewish readers probably hear Nebuchadnezzar's words? What does the proclamation of Nebuchadnezzar as a god, made explicit later in the book, show about him? What irony lies behind Nebuchadnezzar's reference to his mighty hand?
- 2:21–28. With what do these verses deal? Since the itinerary appears to be illogical and obscure at points, what do scholars suspect? How does the Latin Vulgate add to the uncertainty?

##### *For application*

- 2:1–3. Have you ever felt the urge to retaliate against someone who has interfered with your plans, harshly criticized you, or pointedly ignored you? If so, how long did you spend ruminating on how you would execute your revenge before acting on it?
- 2:7–11. In connection with the previous question, how publicly did you speak about your plans to others? What is the purpose of making your threats known in advance of action? How many of these threats did you actually end up carrying out?

#### Chapter 3

##### *For understanding*

- 3:1–8. What do the cities mentioned in 2:28 do before the oncoming hordes of Holofernes? How do we know the Ammonites, Moabites, and Idumeans must have done the same? What is the point of this information?
- 3:7. What are garlands? Where did the custom of weaving them originate? What do the dances and tambourines signify?
- 3:8. What kind of war is Holofernes' military campaign? What is his aim? What are "sacred groves", and with what are they typically associated? What does the language used here recall? On whose initiative is Holofernes acting?
- 3:9. Where is Esdraelon? Where is Dothan, and for what is it known?

##### *For application*

- 3:1–4. Under what circumstances would you surrender, as these cities did, without a fight? Why would you do it? Under what circumstances or according to what values might you fight, even knowing that defeat is all but certain?
- 3:6–8. If you were to lead an invading army, how would you attack the base culture of the country you were invading? If you were among the populace being invaded, how far would you allow an attack on your culture to go? How would you resist?

#### Chapter 4

##### *For understanding*

- 4:4. Which are some of the sites mentioned in this verse that are otherwise unknown? To what does the mention of Samaria refer? What route runs through the region of Samaria? What is Beth-horon? Where is Jericho? To what is the "valley of Salem" perhaps a reference?

## Study Questions: Judith

2. **4:6.** Who is Joakim? What does the mention of him as high priest confirm, and what role does he assume? What is Bethulia? Where is the site, and how is it described? Why is it difficult to determine the original Hebrew spelling of the city's name? What ancient town has been suggested for its location?
3. **Word Study: Senate (4:8).** In the Greek translation of the Pentateuch, to what Hebrew term does the Greek word *gerousia* correspond, and to what does that term refer? In the Book of Deuteronomy, with what was this group of magistrates charged? In the postexilic period, what did the council of elders in Jerusalem do, and what had it become by NT times?
4. **4:10.** What is sackcloth, and when would it be worn? What does putting sackcloth on animals recall?

### For application

1. **4:1–5.** Read the note for these verses. What is the worst emergency you personally or your family or community has faced? How did you prepare to meet it? What part did prayer play in your preparation?
2. **4:6.** For various reasons or according to need, the Church proclaims days or seasons of prayer and fasting. How do you respond to those proclamations? What is your rationale for deciding to participate or not?
3. **4:9.** What is your practice of fasting? In other words, how often do you fast, and what in your mind constitutes a true fast? What are some of your reasons for fasting (or for avoiding it)?
4. **4:12.** In penitential seasons such as Lent, how does your parish church approach decorating the sanctuary (including the altar, the crucifix, and the ambo)? What changes are made to the colors of cloth, banners, hangings, or other decorations? How do these changes affect your own spirituality?

## Chapter 5

### For understanding

1. **5:5–21.** What are these verses about? From what perspective is the story told? What determines whether Israel experiences national prosperity or adversity?
2. **5:5.** Who is Achior? What happens to him when he cautions Holofernes against a hasty attack on Israel? What will he later become? Beyond this, what does the name Achior mean, and what does it subtly indicate? According to the Bible, how are the Israelites and Ammonites kinsmen?
3. **5:7.** Where did Abraham and his family move when they left the city of Ur? Though no reason is given in the Book of Genesis for the change of residence, what does an ancient Jewish tradition hold? How does that tradition apply to Achior? Who are “the gods of their fathers”?
4. **5:16.** Who are the Canaanites? Who are the Shechemites? In patriarchal times, what happened to the Shechemites? What does Judith do with this violent episode later in the book?

### For application

1. **5:5–21.** According to the note for these verses, Israel's historical fortunes are tied up with its commitment to God and his covenant. With what commitments are *our* national fortunes connected? In what do you think our obedience or disobedience would result?
2. **5:5.** Have you ever had to deliver bad news to a superior or offer advice that you were sure would not please the superior? If so, how did you feel about offering that kind of input? How was it received?
3. **5:21.** Psalm 91 promises that those who abide under the shelter of the Most High will enjoy the Lord's protection. What does the word *abide* mean to you? How sincerely do you trust this promise of divine protection? How willing are you to trust in it?
4. **5:22–24.** If you have opposed the plans of a superior, what support have you had from colleagues? If all of them were against you even though you felt that evidence was on your side, how firmly would you hold to your position despite the potential fallout?

## Chapter 6

### For understanding

1. **6:2.** Who are the “hirelings” to whom Holofernes refers? What does he mean by “hirelings of Ephraim”, and who is he perhaps addressing? How is Holofernes' reference to prophecy an instance of irony? What is the theological claim at the heart of the Book of Judith, and how is it tested?
2. **6:5.** What is the instance of irony in this verse?
3. **6:7.** Where will Holofernes have Achior placed, and why? What will later chapters show of this attempt to refute the laws of the covenant explained in the previous chapter?
4. **6:15.** What does the name Uziah mean in Hebrew, and how will Judith outshine him? Where did the southern tribe of Simeon inherit towns? Since settlement patterns shifted over the centuries, where else does the Bible speak of Simeonites living, and when?

### For application

1. **6:2.** Christians are often criticized, mocked, and even threatened for defending Christian moral teachings. How do you respond to such opposition? How well do you understand Christian moral teachings, and how equipped do you feel to defend them? If someone were to challenge your credentials (“Who are you . . .?”), how would you reply?
2. **6:5.** Name-calling is a technique (called *ad hominem*) for attacking or dismissing an opponent without having to deal with his position. Have you ever used this technique in an argument, and, if so, why did you resort to it? Has it ever been used on you, and to what effect?
3. **6:19.** How would you apply the prayer in this verse to present-day circumstances? What sorts of arrogance and humiliation do Christians face today? What does it mean to ask God to “look upon the faces” of those who are praying?

## Chapter 7

### For understanding

1. **7:1-32.** What happens in these verses? What do the warriors do? For what is the stage now set?
2. **7:4.** What do the words of the fearful townsfolk recall about the Israelites in the wilderness?
3. **7:20.** How long does the siege last? How is this figure matched in the second half of the book?
4. **7:28.** What is the truth of the statement that God punishes us according to our sins? How will Judith correct this misperception? To what is the expression "heaven and earth" possibly an allusion in this instance?

### For application

1. **7:1-32.** Read the note for these verses. What examples of siege warfare in recent times can you think of? How are they similar to and different from the type of siege being waged in the Book of Judith? What do you think of the morality of this type of warfare?
2. **7:4-5.** Which is more frightening: watching the movement of a powerful enemy into position against you or beginning the actual combat? What is so terrifying about the anticipation of a looming battle?
3. **7:19.** Read the note for this verse. Have you ever reached a "point of extreme desperation" over a problem you have faced? If so, how did your desperation affect your trust that the Lord would hear your prayer?
4. **7:30-31.** Have you ever tried to make an if-then deal with God, as Uzziah is doing in these verses? What was the issue? How spiritually prudent is such deal-making?

## Chapter 8

### For understanding

1. **8:1.** What does the name Judith mean in Hebrew? For what is she revered? How long is her genealogy? For the author, what does Judith embody? Who was Salamiel, son of Sarasadai? What does that make Judith, like her husband?
2. **8:6.** When was fasting required of an Israelite? When was it practiced more frequently? What makes Judith's commitment to fasting nothing short of heroic? Why was fasting on feast days considered improper?
3. **8:26.** What trials of faith did Abraham face? How did God test Isaac? What did an ancient Jewish tradition about Isaac as a grown man when Abraham bound him for sacrifice imply that Isaac did? Which of Jacob's difficulties in Syrian Mesopotamia are meant?
4. **8:27.** What biblical interpretation of suffering is described here? From this perspective, of what is divine chastisement an expression? How, then, is Judith able to urge city leaders to give thanks in the midst of the present crisis?
5. **8:33.** How many times is reference made to the "hand" of Judith? What does the Hebrew phrase *beyad* ("by the hand of") signal? How is the expression doubly appropriate in her case? What do multiple references to Judith's "hand" bring to mind?

### For application

1. **8:1.** What is the narrator's point in listing Judith's ancestry? How much do you know about your own? What benefit would you derive from knowing more about your lineage?
2. **8:4.** Although remarriage is permitted and sometimes encouraged following the death of a spouse (cf. 1 Tim 5:14), some surviving spouses choose to remain single. What are some reasons for this choice? Why is consecrated widowhood better than simply choosing to remain single?
3. **8:12.** What does it mean to "put God to the test"? What is the difference between "putting the Lord to the test" and asking him for a sign suggesting the direction he wants one to go? Why is the first forbidden but the second allowed?
4. **8:25.** Judith encourages the elders to give thanks to God for putting *them* to the test. Why should we be grateful when God tests our faith and perseverance? According to Heb 12:5-7, what are the benefits of divine discipline?

## Chapter 9

### For understanding

1. **9:1.** Of what are ashes a sign? When and on what is incense burned in the Jerusalem Temple? At what time of day does the evening sacrifice take place? Where else in Scripture are petitions offered at the evening sacrifice, and at what does the practice hint?
2. **9:2.** Why does Judith appeal to the actions of her ancestor Simeon in Gen 34:1-31? What did Simeon and Levi do to the Gentile population of Shechem? What does Judith, who admires her ancestor Simeon, pray for success in doing? As the story unfolds, how will Judith place herself in a position much like that of Dinah, first, and, then, of Simeon?
3. **9:5.** How does the God of Israel show himself the Lord of history?
4. **9:11.** In the OT, who are the lowly? How are they often treated by the wicked? What does the Lord become for them?

### For application

1. **9:1.** Why do Catholics (and some other Christians) put ashes on their foreheads on Ash Wednesday? In the formulas used for imposition of the ashes, what does the minister advise us to remember or to do?
2. **9:5.** Read the note for this verse. What is the relation between God's foreknowledge of future events and human free will? Does his knowledge of what I will do determine my will, including my eternal fate?
3. **9:7.** Psalm 46:10 encourages the reader to "be still, and know that I am God"; the context is that God puts a stop to wars. How do you apply this psalm verse to your own struggles? What does the verb "know" in this verse mean for you?
4. **9:11.** The note for this verse defines who "the lowly" are as Scripture uses the term. Who are the lowly of your acquaintance? Would you place yourself among them? How does the picture of "the lowly" presented here accord with "the blessed" in Mt 5:3-12?

## Chapter 10

### For understanding

1. **10:1-5.** Having made spiritual preparations, what does Judith do? What is her aim? How does every man who encounters her in the following verses react?
2. **10:5.** What kinds of foods did Judith give her maid to take with her? In addition to unclean foods, why did the Israelites avoid other kinds of Gentile foods and wines? Having packed her own meals, what is Judith able politely to do? Who else of the many figures in the OT refused to defile themselves with Gentile foods?
3. **10:12.** What was the term sometimes applied to Israelites by foreigners? What is Judith pretending to be?
4. **10:21.** What is the canopy under which Holofernes is resting? What will it become? What glaring contrast is the reader asked to note?

### For application

1. **10:3-4.** The clothes people wear convey messages to others. If you wished to attract others' attention to yourself, what sort of clothing would you select? How would you dress if you did *not* want people to notice you? When you see someone dressed for attendance at Mass in faded or torn clothing, what do you think that person is communicating to others?
2. **10:5.** What limitations do you place on the kinds of food you eat? On the kinds of food you serve? Are there foods that you consider immoral to eat, or at least questionable? How might your diet provide either encouragement or scandal to someone else (cf. 1 Cor 8:9-13)?
3. **10:17-19.** Read the note for this verse. How do industries such as the advertising, entertainment, or fashion industries use female beauty to captivate an audience? For what purposes? What do sexually alluring women have to do with buying goods like automobiles or furniture?

## Chapter 11

### For understanding

1. **11:1.** Offering words of comfort, of what is the general unaware? What is the irony about Judith? According to St. Ambrose, how does Judith, a good widow, demonstrate bravery?
2. **11:5-19.** How does Judith mislead Holofernes? Since the deliberate use of equivocation makes Judith's speech something of a moral problem, what considerations are relevant to an evaluation of her words? According to St. Thomas Aquinas, what is the real reason Judith is praised by Scripture?
3. **11:12.** While the slaughter of livestock for meat is lawful, what is strictly forbidden about it? Out of desperation, what are the Israelites on the verge of doing?
4. **11:17.** By establishing a nightly routine of exiting the camp for prayer, what is Judith accomplishing?

### For application

1. **11:1.** The note for this verse refers to Holofernes' ignorance of how Judith is "playing" him. What kinds of skill does it take to become a good con artist? How would such a person introduce himself to you? How does the devil tend to operate when he tempts?
2. **11:5-19.** The note for these verses presents some important considerations for evaluating the moral use of language. How do you evaluate these considerations? For example, if "Scripture never teaches that God approves of deception as a morally acceptable means of pursuing an honorable goal", does that mean that he explicitly disapproves it? Is it *ever* licit to lie to an enemy in order to save another's life (cf. CCC 2488-89)?
3. **11:13.** What is sacrilege (CCC 2120)? By describing sacrilege as a "grave sin", what is the *Catechism* saying about its seriousness? How sacrilegious is the Israelites' consumption of food that Judith is describing to Holofernes, given their dire circumstances?

## Chapter 12

### For understanding

1. **12:10.** What is the significance of the fourth day? What does the absence of military personnel indicate that Holofernes is doing relative to Judith's designs?
2. **12:11.** What kind of name is Bagoas? Whom did an advisor of this name serve? What is a eunuch?
3. **Word Study: Deceive (12:16).** What does the Greek verb *apataō* mean? When is speech used as a means of deception in Scripture? When can the term mean "seduce"? In the Book of Judith, how do the verb and its related noun (*apatē*) add to the drama of Judith and Holofernes facing off in a game of wits? How does Judith succeed?

### For application

1. **12:2.** If you had medical limitations such as allergies on the kinds of food you could eat and were invited to a banquet, how would you politely decline to eat what was served? What if your reasons were religious rather than medical or hygienic?
2. **12:7.** Why does the priest at Mass wash his hands before consecrating the bread and wine? What prayer does he say? How might ritual actions such as washing highlight the prayers being recited?
3. **12:13.** Notice the delicacy of Bagoas' invitation to Judith to join Holofernes at his banquet. If you were Judith, how would you interpret his meaning, especially as it concerns becoming "like one of the daughters of the Assyrians"? As a serious Christian, how would you take an invitation to join others' revelry so as to be like everyone else?
4. **12:16.** Read the "Word Study" for this verse. In terms of the virtue of chastity, what is the danger of flirting with someone of either sex? Why is it best to avoid even the appearance of flirting?

## Chapter 13

### For understanding

1. **13:1–20.** What is the climax of the Judith story? Although Judith's action is brutal, what does the author stress about it? According to St. Clement of Rome, how did Judith, made strong by the grace of God, perform her manly deed?
2. **13:6.** To what does the Greek term *akinakēs* refer? What other acts of heroism in the OT does Judith's triumph over Holofernes recall?
3. **13:16.** What kind of formula is "as the Lord lives"? What happens regarding Judith's sexual purity? In the Latin Vulgate, to what does she attribute her protection? According to St. Fulgentius, what powers marched forth to assault the desires of lust and bring about the destruction of pride?
4. **13:18.** What position does Uzziah hold? What other blessings does Uzziah's benediction resemble? What inspired Elizabeth's words to Mary in the Gospel narrative? To whom do these words indicate that Mary's role in salvation history is analogous? What is the difference between Mary's weapon and theirs? According to St. Clement of Alexandria, when did Judith become perfect among women?

### For application

1. **13:4–5.** Think of a time when you faced a necessary but unpleasant duty. How did you stir up the willingness to go through with it? What part, if any, did prayer play in your preparation? What would you change about the way you readied yourself?
2. **13:14.** Reflecting on the duty you faced in the previous question, how well did you succeed? How did you feel about it afterward? What part do you think God may have played in your success, and what thanks did you give him for it?
3. **13:16.** From your adolescence until now, how have your own attitudes toward sexual integrity or chastity changed? How important would you say this virtue is to you now? If you had the chance, how would you work to promote chastity in adolescents?
4. **13:18.** Many representations of the Virgin Mary show her with her foot on the head of a serpent. To what does that depiction allude? In terms of importance, how would you rate the roles of Judith and Mary in the salvation of their people, and why?

## Chapter 14

### For understanding

1. **14:1.** What action described in this verse is a grisly feature of Near Eastern warfare? Like the judge Deborah, of what does Judith take charge?
2. **14:6.** What is Achior, the Ammonite commander handed over to Bethulia, called to do, and why? How is the episode highly ironic?
3. **14:10.** When does Achior come to faith in the God of Israel? How is Achior's conversion sealed? What tension is often-times felt between this verse and Deut 23:3? How does that affect the story of Judith, set in the postexilic period? Besides this, what is an example of an exception to the general rule cited in the note?

### For application

1. **14:1.** Beheadings, whether accidental or deliberate, still occur and are reported in the news. What is there about a beheading that arouses both horror and fascination in us? Why display the head of a victim?
2. **14:10.** Can you pinpoint a time in your life when you came to believe firmly in God? If so, what happened to seal your conversion? If not, how would you describe your growth toward a personal, living relationship with God?
3. **14:14–18.** Imagine yourself in the place of Bagoas. What would have been your responsibilities to Holofernes? What sort of shock or panic would you feel when you discovered what Judith had done? Since you were responsible for Holofernes' security, how would you regard your failure to protect him? Does his situation compare with any experience in your own life?

## Chapter 15

### For understanding

1. **15:1–15.** What do the warriors of Israel do to the retreating Assyrians? What is Judith given from the spoils of victory?
2. **15:9.** What was the result of Judith's daring plan? To whom does the benediction here pronounced on Judith apply in the Catholic liturgy?
3. **15:12.** What did the women of Israel traditionally do following a military triumph? What kinds of branches would they wave and when?
4. **15:13.** What does the Greek custom of crowning people with olive wreaths suggest about when the Book of Judith was written or last edited? Where is the parade of celebrants going? What does the event recall?

### For application

1. **15:4–5.** The events in these verses imply some sort of swift communication. How quickly would news of the Assyrian rout have traveled throughout what would be the equivalent of modern Palestine? How quickly might news of such a rout travel with our current means of communication?
2. **15:9.** Read the note for this verse. What are some of the reasons this blessing upon Judith is applied to the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Catholic liturgy?
3. **15:12–13.** When might modern peoples engage in dancing and victory parades like those described in these verses? In addition to dancing, what are some other ways for groups to express joy?

## Chapter 16

### *For understanding*

1. **16:1–17.** By what titles does the Song of Judith exalt the God of Israel? What is the main lesson of the Song? What is the primary inspiration behind the Song of Judith, and how is Yahweh described in both? Likewise, what does the mention of God using “the hand” of a woman to save Israel from the Assyrians recall?
2. **16:16.** What is the heart of Israel’s faith? In what way do the liturgical rites express fear of the Lord?
3. **16:22.** After the Assyrian crisis passes, what does Judith choose to do? How does she handle her sexual purity for the rest of her life? How usual was consecrated widowhood in biblical Israel? According to St. Fulgentius, what makes it clear that God loves a widow’s continence?
4. **16:23.** For what is a long life sometimes a reward? What do scholars who read the Judith story as an allegory of the Maccabean period often point out? Why does an intended allusion to this period seem unlikely?

### *For application*

1. **16:1–2.** Judith praises God using rhythm instruments (tambourines and cymbals). What instruments would you choose if you wanted to “loudly sing” a song of praise? How can musical instruments enhance prayer?
2. **16:14.** How does Judith describe in this verse God’s manner of creating? According to the *Catechism* (687–88), how do we come to know the Holy Spirit?
3. **16:16.** Read the note for this verse. If fear of the Lord is the heart of Israel’s faith, what place should it hold in Christian faith? How does fear of the Lord contribute to love of the Lord?
4. **16:19.** The note for this verse defines what a “votive offering” is. What kinds of votive offerings do Christians make (e.g., at Lourdes and similar shrines)? What do these offerings express?