

# **Dr. David deSilva, Apocrypha, Lecture 3, A Closer Look: 1 and 2 Maccabees, and Judith**

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This is Dr. David DeSilva in his teaching on the Apocrypha. This is session 3, A Closer Look: 1 and 2 Maccabees and Judith.

As the author of 2 Maccabees retells the part of the story that interests him as he creates his abridgment of the work of Jason of Cyrene, one of the interests that seems to drive him is to provide a theological interpretation of this story.

One of the noteworthy things about 2 Maccabees is that where the narrator intrudes upon the story in his own voice, it's often to provide commentary on the events of the story from a Deuteronomistic perspective, showing that, in fact, the old rules of history in Deuteronomy still hold true throughout this period. Therefore, there are lessons to be learned from the story of this period for how we should live profitably as Jews and as the Jewish nation going into the future. Deuteronomy's theology of history emerges most clearly from chapters 27 to 30 in that book.

One of the first premises is that obedience to the covenant, obedience to the law of Moses, brings the covenant blessings. Hence, Deuteronomy 28.1, carefully keeping all his commandments that I am giving you right now, this is Moses speaking, will result in God-exalting Israel high above all the nations on earth. These blessings included, within this exaltation, the fertility of the land and of its inhabitants, the security of the people in the city and in rural areas, and protection against enemies who attempt to attack and honor in the sight of all the neighboring people.

Moses went on to warn, however, in chapter 28, that disregard for these commandments would bring curses upon the nation of Israel, the barrenness of land and people, vulnerability to foreign attack and natural plague, the decimation of the population, and ultimately conquest and decimation by a foreign power. However, God was always merciful. If, after disobedience and experience of covenant curses, the people repented and renewed their obedience, they would experience deliverance and a return to favor.

Hence, Deuteronomy 30 verses 2 to 3, if the people return to the Lord your God, obeying his voice in line with all that I'm commanding you right now, you and your children, with all your mind and with all your being, then the Lord your God will restore you as you were before and will have compassion on you, gathering you up from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. Now, this theology of history provides a template for the author's interpretation of the story. So, for example, in 2 Maccabees 3, after the author has talked about the episode with Heliodorus, who threatened to go into the temple and take out its sacred deposits,

the author, sorry, the end of that story, of course, is that in response to the prayers of the righteous high priest Onias, God stops Heliodorus and turns him back and preserves the sanctity of his sacred place.

And so, the author basically attributes this to the fact that, quote, the holy city was living in harmony, and people observed the laws of God strictly because of Onias, the high priest who was devoted to God and hated evil. When Jason introduces his constitutional reforms, making the Torah no longer the formal political constitution and replacing it with a Greek constitution, the author now intervenes. He noticed a significant change in how the high priest was leading the land between Onias' fidelity to the Torah and his younger brother Jason's setting aside of the Torah as the political constitution of the land.

So, the author comments that, for this reason, a dangerous situation engulfed them. Those same people to whom they were devoted and whose way of life they wished to imitate, namely the Greeks, became their enemies and inflicted punishment on them. To be ungodly in the face of the divine laws isn't a light matter, as the following events would reveal.

The author continues to put his deuteronomistic spin on these events when he comes shortly after Antiochus IV's raid on the temple. On the one hand, Seleucus IV, his brother, had sent an agent to raid the temple for its funds and was stopped short. But Antiochus IV, when he enters, no one stops him.

God doesn't send angels on horseback to beat him back. He goes in and he comes out with the gold and the silver. Why? The author explains this in terms of Deuteronomy.

In 2 Maccabees 5, we read that Antiochus was really pleased with himself, not realizing that the Lord had become angry for a short time because of the sins of those who lived in the city. For this reason, he had shut his eyes to the holy temple. If they hadn't previously been involved in so many sins, Antiochus would have been forced to abandon his rashness and be defeated at once when he attacked, just like Heliodorus.

But, the author promises that which the Almighty abandoned in his wrath would again be restored with all glory when the nation was reconciled to the great Lord, thus remembering that there would be a turn toward repentance and obedience and that God would be reconciled to his people and, of course, the success of the Maccabean revolt would prove that. When the author comes to the story of the martyrdoms, he provides, again, commentary on the episode, especially before he gets there. And his interpretation of the martyrdoms is, again, in line with Deuteronomy.

So, we read in 2 Maccabees 6, verses 12 and following, these punishments, talking about the rendering of Torah as illegal and the persecutions. These punishments weren't for the destruction of our people but for their discipline. It is a sign of great kindness that those Jews who acted immorally weren't left alone for very long but experienced punishments immediately. With other nations, the Lord patiently delays punishment until they fill up the full measure of their sins.

But, with us, he decided to deal differently and exacted retribution on us before our sins reached their peak. Therefore, he never withdraws his mercy from us. Although disciplining us with misfortunes, God doesn't forsake his own people.

Now, there's a bit of a problem in the martyrdom episode that follows. It is those Jews who are obedient to the Torah who are brutally mistreated and, in some cases, torn to pieces by Antiochus IV and his soldiers. So, how does the author deal with this? On the one hand, he acknowledges and, in fact, has the martyrs themselves acknowledge that God punishes the nation as a collective whole.

And so, the individual obedience or disobedience, let me rephrase that, the obedience or disobedience of the individual Jew doesn't guarantee what that individual Jew will experience in this life. It's the fact that the nation was disobedient that made it happen that both obedient and disobedient Jews within the nation would suffer the calamities that came upon them. However, there would also be a twist to this.

Namely, the fact that the obedient Jew was willing to be obedient to the point of death in this situation would be that which turned the tide for the whole nation. The willingness of these Jews to stand by the covenant to the end against the fiercest of pains and torments would have a representative effect on the whole nation. And, as the author will put it, turn the Lord's wrath back toward mercy.

So, in regards to all of this, we could read some texts from 2 Maccabees 7. The martyrs themselves say we suffer these things because of our own sins against our God. Or, slightly later, we are suffering because of our own sins. If our living Lord is angry for a short time in order to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants.

So, they accept the fact that even though they themselves, no doubt, have been Torah observant all along, can still justly stand there and be punished as part of the sinful nation. However, because they are innocent because they are Torah-observant Jews in the midst of a disobedient nation, they can offer their lives also on behalf of their nation. And so, we read toward the end of the martyrdom scene in 2 Maccabees 7, Just like my brothers, I give up both body and life for the sake of the ancestral laws.

I call upon God to be merciful to the nation without delay and to make you confess after you suffer trials and diseases that only he is God. Also, I hope that through me and my brothers we can stop the anger of the Almighty who is justly punishing our entire nation. And so, by enduring these egregious tortures, the brother says, I hope that now this will be enough for God.

So that punishing us, us brothers to the full, he will be satisfied and then have mercy upon the living Jews who remain. And what happens in the very next episode shows that God's wrath has turned to mercy. In chapter 8, verse 5, the author comments that once Judas, the Maccabee, once Judas organized his army, the Maccabee couldn't be stopped by the Gentiles because the Lord's wrath had turned to mercy.

So, within the narrative, there's some acknowledgment of the efficacy of the death of the righteous martyrs for the sake of the whole people. It was the act of covenant obedience that affected the turn that we read about in Deuteronomy 30. But in this case, it's the turn of the few that are able to bring back the covenant blessings for the many.

The episode that follows, in which Judas first defeats a powerful army led by the Syrian General Nicanor, shows the efficacy of the death of the martyrs and also attributes the renewed obedience, attributes to the renewed obedience to the covenant to the unstoppable nature of Judah's forces. Now, we still have a problem here in regard to God's justice and the promises of Deuteronomy. The martyrs could accept the fact that they died because they were in the midst of a disobedient nation, and that's just.

God is justly punishing the nation, but what about the martyrs themselves? How is Deuteronomy true if covenant obedience led to being torn apart by the butcher Antiochus and his soldiers? The author solves this by looking to the hope of the resurrection. When covenant loyalty does not lead to the promised blessings in this life, there is the hope that covenant loyalty will lead to the promised blessings in the life to come. And so, throughout the martyr narrative of chapter seven, the brothers who are being tortured to death bear witness to their hope in the resurrection.

You may take our present life, but the king of the universe, for whose laws we die, will resurrect us again to eternal life. And then another brother talks about his extremities that the tyrant has just ordered to be cut off. I have received these limbs from heaven, and I give them up for the sake of God's laws, but I hope to recover them from God again.

And then another brother says death at the hands of humans is preferable since we look forward to the hope that God gives of being raised by him. But for you, there will be no resurrection to life. So, in Second Maccabees, we have one of the first certain witnesses to the hope of the resurrection, an outgrowth of the conviction

that the promises of God in Deuteronomy cannot fail in regard to the individual or to the nation as a whole.

Now, the author of Second Maccabees makes some other theological comments in the course of his narrative, and one of them, particularly, is what's responsible for getting him in trouble with the Protestant reformers. At one point, Judas and his army suffered a terrible defeat, an inexplicable defeat, because God has been with them for four chapters of battles in Second Maccabees 8, 9, 10, and 11, and suddenly in Chapter 12, he suffers a defeat. Why? The author gives us both the explanation and then makes his theological comment on it.

On the next day after this defeat, it was necessary for Judas and his men to recover the bodies of the fallen and to bury them with their relatives in the ancestral tombs. They found sacred charms and idols from Jamnia that the law forbids Jews to wear under the clothing of each of the dead soldiers. It became clear to all why these men had fallen.

Then, they all praised the Lord, the righteous judge who makes hidden things visible. They appealed to God and prayed that the sin that had been committed would be completely wiped out. The Honorable Judas called on the people to keep themselves free from sin, since everyone had seen what had happened because of the sin of those who fell.

After taking a collection from each man, he sent the sum of 2,000 silver drachma to Jerusalem to provide for a sin offering. And here is the commentary on the part of the author. He was acting honorably and appropriately, thinking about the resurrection.

If he hadn't been looking forward to the resurrection of the dead, then it would have been unnecessary and frivolous to pray for them. He was looking instead, however, to that best reward laid up for those who die in godliness. And so, this was a pious and holy thought.

Thus, he made an offering of reconciliation so that the dead would be forgiven of their sin. Now, of course, this is a problematic text later in the history of the Christian church because it seems to be a very strong text, supporting the practice of things that I can do to get someone else out of the judgment for his or her sins. Indeed, the editor, the abridger who produced Second Maccabees, does understand Judas's action this way.

However, if we think historically about what Judas did, it's far more likely that Judas himself wasn't looking ahead to the resurrection of the dead and wasn't performing this, wasn't providing for the sacrifice for the dead soldiers, but rather for the living soldiers. It was a sin offering for the army so that God would no longer be angry at

the army but would grant them his support in battle again so that they would now start having victories. But it's the author of Second Maccabees who interprets this act as a sin offering on behalf of the dead and, in doing so, gets this whole text into trouble with the Protestant reformers.

Now, as we turn to First Maccabees, on the one hand, the author of First Maccabees doesn't repudiate the theology of Second Maccabees in any way. The author of First Maccabees also reads Deuteronomy and believes in it as a meaningful framework for understanding Jewish history, including the recent history. But First Maccabees is also interested in some other things that Second Maccabees might not be.

So, for example, while he would agree that Torah observance leads to God's help and success, he celebrates a different kind of zeal for the law than the author of Second Maccabees celebrated in the martyr stories. The author of Second Maccabees gives us two chapters of martyr stories. The author of First Maccabees gives us three or four verses of martyr stories.

The kind of zeal for the law that this author wants to celebrate is the zeal that was shown by Mattathias and his sons. The zeal for the law that had been shown by Phineas when he took his spear and ran through an Israelite and his Midianite concubine. The violent purging of the nation is another expression of zeal for the Torah that can't be neglected.

And we already looked, or we already spoke in our last lecture about the incident at Modin. But the author of First Maccabees, who gives us this story, Second Maccabees doesn't, the author of First Maccabees specifically connects the acts of Mattathias with the tradition of violent zeal for the law that we find in the wilderness narrative. Of Exodus through Numbers.

So, when Moses, sorry, Moses, when Mattathias saw this other villager step forward to offer sacrifice to a foreign god at the behest of the Syrian, Greco-Syrian king's officer, Mattathias burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger. He ran and killed him on the altar.

And here's the commentary. He burned with zeal for the law just as Phineas did against Zimri, son of Salu. Now, this is important because Phineas was granted the covenant of an eternal priesthood because of his act.

Mattathias' descendants will occupy the place of the high priest in Israel for about 80 or 90 years. And so, this story becomes a first step in the legitimation of this new dynasty of high priests because it was not a high priestly family and kings in Judea. Then Mattathias does something that very directly recalls something Moses had done.

After this act of zeal, and after killing the Greco-Syrian official and his soldiers as well, Mattathias cries out in the town with a loud voice, saying, let everyone who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me. And so, they do. One can't help but recall Moses after the golden calf incident crying out, let everyone who is faithful to the Lord come to my side.

And the Levites do. They then execute judgment upon their brothers, the other tribes who had participated in apostasy. This is indeed what Mattathias and his sons do.

At least, this is part of what they do. Like those Levites in the wake of the Golden Calf incident, Judas and his guerrilla band searched out and pursued those who broke the law. He burned those who troubled his people.

He went through the cities of Judah. He destroyed the ungodly out of the land. Thus, he turned away wrath from Israel.

In this, we see that Judas had two targets. The target, one target, was the Gentile oppressor in the land. The other target was the Jew who broke the law.

And by getting rid of both, he cleansed, he destroyed the ungodly out of the land and turned away wrath from Israel. That last line is probably significant in comparison with 2 Maccabees. As we recall, what turned away wrath from Israel in 2 Maccabees? It was the faithful death of the martyrs who offered obedience to the Torah to the point of death to God.

Here, it's the burning zeal against the apostate in the land that at least is part of what turns away wrath from Israel. And, of course, we know from Deuteronomy that the apostate Jew presents a threat to the whole nation. According to Deuteronomy 27 through 32, God's preservation and protection of the Jewish people as a whole is linked to the people's obedience as a whole.

One doesn't know in advance where the tipping point is, but every Jew who starts turning away from the covenant pushes Israel a bit closer to that tipping point. Now, as I've already intimated, one of the main interests of the author of 1 Maccabees seems to be to legitimate the rise of this dynasty, the Hasmonean dynasty, the successors to Judas and his brothers. One step in this is to look to Phineas as kind of a prototype of someone whose violent zeal for the law wins for him an eternal covenant of the priesthood.

And on his deathbed, Mattathias is given to remember Phineas as a prototype. Phineas, our ancestor, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood because he was deeply zealous. Implicitly, the author is suggesting, and so it's right, that the

descendants of Phineas come back to life, that the descendants of Mattathias should enjoy the covenant of the place of high priesthood as well.

There's an interesting episode in 1 Maccabees, kind of early in the military exploits of Judas and his brothers, where two other Jewish leaders, Joseph and Azariah, want to make a name for themselves as well. And so, while Judas and Jonathan, and I'm reading here from 1 Maccabees 5, while Judas and Jonathan were in Gilead and their brother Simon was in Galilee before Ptolemaeus, Joseph, the son of Zechariah, and Azariah, the commanders of the forces, heard of their brave deeds, the brave deeds of Judas and his brothers, and of the heroic war they had fought. So, they said, let us also make a name for ourselves.

Let us go and make war on the Gentiles around us. Now, this ended up leading to disaster for both Joseph and Azariah's soldiers. And the explanation the author gives is that, quote, the people suffered a great rout because, thinking to do a brave deed, they did not listen to Judas and his brothers.

They did not belong to the family of those men through whom deliverance was given to Israel. So, there's a claim here that God had specifically selected this family to be its agents of salvation, its agents of deliverance for the nation. This, again, could be heard as a strong dynastic claim for this family.

Toward the end of his story, the author of 1 Maccabees provides another avenue for the legitimation of the family. That is to say, because the family gave so much to the nation and accomplished so much on behalf of the nation, the only response of gratitude that the nation could properly make would be to vote these people to be their ongoing leaders, their ongoing rulers. And so we read in 1 Maccabees 14, again toward the end of the story, when the people heard these things, some of the new achievements of Simon, the last surviving brother on behalf of the nation when the people heard these things, they said, how shall we thank Simon and his sons? For he and his brothers and the house of his father have stood firm.

They have fought and repulsed Israel's enemies and established its freedom. And so, in gratitude, just 10 verses later, they made Simon their leader and their high priest because he had done all these things and because of the justice and loyalty that he had maintained toward his nation. So, the rule of Simon, and not him only, but also his sons, John Hyrcanus I, and then the sons of John Hyrcanus I, Simon's grandsons in order and so forth, is a legitimate rule because of God's choice of this family to be the agents of deliverance, because of the zeal that this family showed, just like Phineas had shown.

And we know what happened to Phineas and his line. And because of the immense debt and obligation that the nation incurred due to the sacrifice of every member of



this family on behalf of the nation. Not one of them died a peaceful death in the course of winning political independence for the nation.

So they are, according to this author, a legitimate dynasty now. I should just mention why is this even important. By the time we get to the grandsons of Simon, the last brother of Judas, there are significant questions being raised by other people about the legitimacy of this dynasty. I could simply point to the people gathered in Qumran who were gathered there specifically because they did not believe that the priest in Jerusalem was legitimate.

He was the wicked priest. And while several candidates have been suggested for the wicked priest, every last one of them is a Hasmonean high priest. Instead, they look forward to two messiahs when God would set things right.

A messiah from the house of David, who would be a rightful king, and a messiah from the house of Aaron, who would be a rightful priest. As far as they were concerned, the family of Simon neither had a claim to the legitimate high priesthood or to be king over Israel. So, things like that, developments like that, would make a book like 1 Maccabees a welcome piece of dynastic propaganda.

Now, both 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees are interested in establishing a new festival in the Jewish calendar. What is known as the Feast of Dedication in ancient literature, or Hanukkah as it's now known and now always referred to. This was a feast to celebrate the recapturing of the temple, the cleansing of the temple and the restoration of the Torah prescribed worship of the one God in the temple.

Jews in Judea actively promoted the observance of this new festival, celebrating God's recent acts on behalf of God's temple as the two letters that are now prefixed to 2 Maccabees in its first two chapters attest. Both 1st and 2nd Maccabees also incidentally reflect the importance of certain identity or boundary markers for Jews, as well as Gentile awareness of these boundary markers.

These are, of course, the importance of circumcision, which was one of the acts that was specifically proscribed under Antiochus IV on pain of death but still performed by Jewish families for their children accepting the pain of death. Dietary restrictions emerge very forcefully in the martyr stories. Eat a mouthful of pork, save yourself from being ripped limb from limb.

No, because this is that important, an identity marker, a boundary marker within Torah. And, of course, Sabbath observance. I didn't mention this, but one of the kind of minor vignettes in 1st Maccabees is the massacre of a group of faithful Jewish freedom fighters on the Sabbath very early in the conflict, because those Jewish freedom fighters refused to fight back on the Sabbath day.

They refused to profane the Sabbath day. And a decision that Mattathias has to come to that we won't attack on the Sabbath day, but if we are attacked, we must defend ourselves on the Sabbath day, or else there will be no one left to protect the law. We turn now to another book in the Apocrypha, the book of Judith, which is clearly a work of historical fiction.

Any ancient reader, I won't say any, but many ancient readers would recognize as they read the first chapter of Judith that it just tells the story all wrong when set against our own sacred scriptures. We know the story of Nebuchadnezzar. We know the story of Assyria.

We know the stories of their advance into Judea. And this is not that story. So we have a kind of fictionalized version of the story that's openly fictionalized, and so it has several goals.

It wants to tell some story. It wants to provide a narrative demonstration, as it were, of some essential theological truths as well as promoting certain patterns of behavior. And it's a great story, so I'm going to take some time here and simply tell the story.

And part of the goal of Judith, like another text that we'll come to shortly, Tobit, is surely to entertain with a good story, which this simply is. So, the book opens with an honor challenge and a response. Nebuchadnezzar calls for his Western vassals to support him in his war against the Medes.

Now, this, of course, is a fictionalized war. We know from reading the scriptural historical books this never happened. But for the sake of the story, Nebuchadnezzar is posed making war on the Medes, and he calls his western vassals to support him.

His western vassals disrespect Nebuchadnezzar by refusing his call, his summons. And so, they have violated Nebuchadnezzar's honor, and Nebuchadnezzar makes a mental note. I am going to get satisfaction on my western vassals, and I'm going to show them whose honor they have just trampled.

And so, after his victory over the Medes, he sends his general, Holofernes, to exact revenge upon them. And, of course, Holofernes is a vicious, brutal, and successful general. The western vassal nations submit to him left and right.

Now in the course of Holofernes' advance, Holofernes opens up a second honor contest. Because while he accepts the submission of these nations, he destroys their temples. And he institutes instead the cult of the god Nebuchadnezzar.

And so, as a kind of punishment, he insists that they're not going to worship their own gods anymore. They're going to worship Nebuchadnezzar. They're going to

show Nebuchadnezzar the honor that is his due in a way they failed to do before when he called them to help.

Now, something different is happening in Israel. The Israelites don't submit. Instead, they mobilize for war.

Because they know that if they submit, their temple will be destroyed. And they can't do that. They can't let that happen.

They must defend the temple for the sake of their commitment to the one god. And Holofernes holds a war council in his camp as he contemplates how he's going to deal with Israel. One of the vassals, one of the vassal people's generals named Achior, who is an Ammonite in the story, advises Holofernes that he won't be able to defeat the people to defeat Israel as long as Israel is faithful to the covenant.

So, we find here Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy's theology, beginning to be woven into this story. And Achior, an Ammonite, is the one who gives the first witness to it. Now Holofernes is incensed at this advice.

Who is God except Nebuchadnezzar? Why is my success or defeat dependent on their god, the Israelites' god, and their obedience to their god? So, Holofernes reinforces the second honor contest, God versus God. Whose honor is greater? Who's the real god? And he sends Achior bound off to the first Jewish city that Holofernes will come to, the city of Bethulia, the fictional city of Bethulia. It's not on any map because it doesn't exist.

And he leaves Achior there to share in the fate of the Israelites. The people of Bethulia let Achior in. He tells them why he's there, and they comfort him because, of course, he bore true testimony about Israel and about their god.

Now, Holofernes prepares to take his first step toward defeating Israel. And the first step is to conquer Bethulia because if he can't get through the pass at Bethulia, he'll never be able to get to Jerusalem. Again, purely fictional.

You might even recognize the story of the 300 Spartans in this a bit because there is no single pass. They have to get through to conquer Israel as aggressor after aggressor proved in the history of Israel. There are many ways to conquer Israel.

But in this fictional story, there's only one way to get in there, and it's through Bethulia, so we have got to take it. And the Edomite vassals, so we see a little bit of tension between the probably Judean author of the story and the Idumeans, the Edomites to the south. The Edomite vassals assist Holofernes by giving him the strategy.

They show him where the springs are from which Bethulia gets its water, and so Holofernes is able to occupy those places to besiege the city and just to wait it out. 34 days pass, and the people are now running perilously low on food and on water, and the people of Bethulia go to their elders and pressure them to agree to submit to Holofernes so they don't all die of lack of water and lack of food. And the elders agree, if God doesn't deliver us in five more days, we will surrender to Holofernes.

Now, it's only here, at the halfway point of the book, that we meet Judith, the heroine of the story. She's a widow, a virtuous and well-respected woman in the town, so well-respected that she summons the elders to her home, which is interesting. She doesn't go out to the public spaces to do this, but she summons them to the private space where she lives, and she chides them for making such an agreement with the people.

It's the city's duty to die rather than allow God's temple to be violated. But she announces that God will deliver them nonetheless by her hand. So, she gets herself all ready to go.

She's dressed to kill, and she goes out with her maidservant to the camp of Holofernes. She takes enough food of her own and her own dishes to make it through the next four days, so she's prepared to keep kosher while she's in the camp of the Assyrian enemy. And as soon as she gets down there, she's arrested, of course, and taken to the general, who is immediately smitten by her.

And she goes to the general, and she lies to him. She says that her people are so desperate for food that they're about to eat the tithes that have been stored up for the priests in Jerusalem. Of course, as soon as they do that, they have violated the law.

They will alienate God, and she doesn't want to be any part of that or any part of what's going to come down on their heads after they violate the covenant. So, she's deserted and comes to Holofernes for safety. She gets permission to leave the camp every night, perform a ritual washing, and pray to God.

And she says, God will tell me when they've done this, and then you'll be able to attack them and defeat them with no problem because their divine protection will be removed. On the fourth night, Holofernes decides that there's no way this beautiful woman is getting out of the camp without him having her. In fact, he even reasons to himself it would be a disgrace to him.

She'll even laugh at me if I, a virile man, am not able to seduce her during her time here. So, a third honor contest is launched. Holofernes' honor as a virile male versus Judith's honor as a chaste widow.

This is the opportunity that Judith has been waiting for. And on the night, she's,, of course,, leading him on, and on the night when Holofernes thinks something's going to happen, he drinks too much and, after he dismisses his bodyguard, is left alone with Judith in his tent, he passes out. Judith takes his sword and hacks off his head with two strokes.

And she's already established her alibi because every night she goes out of the camp to wash herself in the stream and pray to God. So, she leaves the camp with her food sack, which now contains Holofernes' head, and goes back to her city and produces it for the elders of the city. And Achior is there of course, and he's seen Holofernes, looking better, and is able to confirm that this in fact is the head of the Assyrian general.

And so, the men of Bethulia are able to go down en masse and attack the enemy camp. The enemy camp is taken by surprise, and the lieutenants go in to rouse their general to get orders, and they find the headless corpse of their general instead. So the whole army is in disarray, and they flee.

And, of course, they're struck down for days from the rear, from the onslaught from the rear. So, Judith has preserved her honor. As she declares, as soon as she gets back, he never laid a hand on me.

I was able to cut off his head, but he never touched me. God has preserved God's honor by preserving his temple and sending the enemy army fleeing. Nebuchadnezzar has lost honor because, as the narrator says, the whole house of Nebuchadnezzar has been disgraced by his general's failure to keep his head.

Achior, the Ammonite, converts fully to Judaism. He is circumcised, purified, undergoes a ritual purification, and joins himself to the people of Israel. And Judith sings a marvelous psalm of praise before retiring again to private life.

Now, let's think about this story in its context a little bit. It gives every sign of having been composed after the Maccabean revolt, probably in Hebrew, probably in Judea. For example, Achior, in his speech when he's giving counsel to Holofernes, looks back upon the recent defilement and cleansing of the temple, not back upon its destruction and rebuilding.

So, we have a kind of a historical glitch here, an anachronism. He should historically be talking about destruction and rebuilding such as we read about after the Babylonian conquest. Instead, he talks about defilement and cleansing just as we read about in First Maccabees or Second Maccabees.

The threat that Holofernes poses, the threat of a new profanation of the temple, is also reminiscent of Antiochus' actions. And the military power of the high priest,

which didn't make it into my summary, but the polity of Israel reflected in the larger story of Judith is more reminiscent of Hasmonean period polity. And, of course, the climactic battle contains reminiscences of Judith's defeat of Nicanor, including the hanging of various body parts of the general from the wall of the city.

The story of Judith seems to be inspired by biblical stories. The story of Jael and Sisera in Judges 4-5 come to mind. Again, with similar motifs of the violation of certain codes in the case of Jael and Sisera, the code of hospitality, in the case of Judith, more kind of the code of lying versus truth-telling, as well as the motif of an enemy of Israel being delivered into the hand of a woman in both stories.

Judith's song of deliverance itself is reminiscent of Deborah's song of triumph in Judges 5, as well as the song of Moses in Exodus 15. And the story may also look beyond Scripture to some other influences, perhaps from some Greek stories. For example, as I had mentioned earlier, the story, perhaps by this time well-known, of the Spartans at the Pass of Thermopylae, or also the story of Themistocles' use of deceit to lead the Persian navy to defeat at Salamis.

The ideal woman in the Greco-Roman and Jewish world of the Second Temple period was submissive, silent, and sexually pure. Judith is an interesting character because she both challenges and reconfirms this ideal. On the one hand, she is chaste and this is very much in the forefront.

Even while she uses her feminine charms to seduce Holofernes, the enemy general, she remains chaste before, during, and after the story. She looks after the home, and she manages her dead husband's household and business, but she's not silent. She summons even while she stays in the private spaces, she summons the elders and chides them, reams them out for making a bad judgment call and not telling the people we're going to hold out to death because that's what God deserves from us.

She is the one who actually gives the order to charge the enemy camp at the end. On the other hand, she acknowledges, in the story, her weakness, the fact that God is going to deliver by the hand of a woman, is not a celebration of woman's strength, but a celebration of God's strength in this story. And also, she very notably returns to a private role after her brief work as God's agent is done.

She doesn't remain in any public leadership role at all, so it's an interesting story about women's roles, what God can accomplish through them, but also not really breaking out of those roles in any permanent way. Now, one of the moral questions that the story of Judith raises has to do with the ethics of deceit. She lies through her teeth, left and right, to achieve God's ends, successfully.

What is this story telling us about lying and deceit? First thing she does is she lies to Holofernes and his soldiers about conditions in Bethulia. They are not about to sin

against God by eating the tithes and, therefore, lose God's protection, even as she swears to them to be telling the truth about what's happening in that city. She lies to them about her intentions as she goes outside the enemy camp each night to purify herself in a stream and to pray, posing as a prophetess to whom God would reveal her people's transgressions.

That's not her intent at all. She's establishing her alibi, her escape route for after she performs the act. In prayer, she even asks God to use her, quote, lying lips, end quote, as the means by which to effect his deliverance of his people.

Throughout her dialogues with Holofernes, she seems to delight in ambiguous speech, which is also part of her attempt to deceive. She says one thing, just enough of the truth, but the reader knows, and Judith knows, she means something quite different by that. She leads Holofernes on to think that he will have his way with her before she leaves his camp.

Now, what's happening here? This is not merely a tale about the end justifying the means, but what it's showing us is that in the ancient world, deceit was actually an appropriate strategy to advance the interests of or preserve the honor of oneself or one's primary reference group against the assault of outsiders on those interests or that honor. Truth is not a gift that is owed to outsiders or enemies because they're not looking out for our interests. But truth is owed to members of one's own group, whether family, a circle of associates, or a nation, those who will not use such knowledge against the giver.

Again, we might compare Themistocles of Athens who lures the Persian fleet commanders to their defeat by pretending to form a political alliance with them against the other Greek city-states and by providing false intelligence reports. Judith uses deceit, moreover, as part of her plan to overcome these outsiders' challenges to her own personal honor and to God's honor. Holofernes challenges the honor of God of Israel forthrightly and, of course, in the camp, challenges Judith's honor by his desire to have her.

The story of Judith also shows us a picture of people intensely committed to observing the boundaries between Jews and Gentiles, to observing those Torah-prescribed rules or practices that we might call keeping kosher, which also maintain a very clear us-and-them boundary. When Judith leaves Bethulia to enter the Assyrian camp, she takes her own food, plates, and utensils. And so, when she appears before Holofernes, she doesn't eat his food.

She very visibly pulls out her own tableware and her food and drink when dining with him. So even while having table fellowship, there's this clear boundary established between Judith the Jew and Holofernes the not-Jew. And, of course, she observes the sexual boundary.

That's not only proper to her as a woman, but doubly important because she's a female Jew and he's a Gentile male. So affirms that Holofernes committed no sin with him. Sorry, with her, to pollute or to shame her.

Now even while Judith, as a book, is affirming these boundaries, Judith actually gives us one of the few positive windows into Gentile conversion in all of the Apocrypha. One might even say all of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. There is one other text that really highlights this, and that's the pseudepigraphical text Joseph and Asenath, which tells the story of Asenath, the daughter of an Egyptian priest, of Asenath's conversion to Judaism prior to her marriage to Joseph the patriarch.

So here we have Achior, an Ammonite of all things, who understands the covenant relationship between God and God's people, Israel, who confesses this knowledge and, in doing so, joins himself in a preliminary way to the people of God because the residents of Bethulia welcome him into their midst as he is sent there to share their fate, and who, after witnessing God's deliverance, joins them accepting circumcision as the sign, par excellence, that he himself has crossed over the boundary between being a non-Jew to become a Jew. In our next session, we'll begin to look at other texts, including the Apocalypse Second Esdras, which will make us fast forward through the intertestamental period quite a ways to the end of the first century.

This is Dr. David DeSilva in his teaching on the Apocrypha. This is session 3, A Closer Look: 1 and 2 Maccabees and Judith.