



Judith

The story of Judith features, unsurprisingly, Judith as its main heroine. Judith, whom we are told was both very beautiful and a widow, was horrified that her fellow Jews did not trust in God to deliver them from their enemies, the Assyrians. So she went to the Assyrian camp and befriended its general, Holofernes. One night while he lay drunk in his bed, she cut off his head and took it back to her fellow Jews. This saved the Jews from the Assyrians who, without a leader, left the campaign and returned home.



How long will it take?

Reading time: About 1 hour
Short of time? Just read 2.1-11; 4.1-15;
 8.1-10; 13.1-8; 15.1-6



Anything tricky?

Well Judith, the hero of the story, decapitated the general of the Assyrian army and was hailed for saving her people. It's a great read but it does raise numerous questions.



Genre

Historical Fiction



Inspiring quotes

Who are you to put God to the test today, and to set yourselves up in the place of God in human affairs?
(Judith 8.12)

For your strength does not depend on numbers, nor your might on the powerful. But you are the God of the lowly, helper of the oppressed, upholder of the weak, protector of the forsaken, saviour of those without hope.
(Judith 9.11)



About the Author

Very little is known about the origins of the book of Judith. Scholars cannot even agree whether it was written first in Hebrew, Aramaic or in Greek (it now exists only in Greek). Some think that the author was a Jew (not a Samaritan) but

the frequent references to Dothan (3.9; 4.6; 7.3; 7.18; 8.3) suggest he might have had a particular connection to Samaria, because that is where Dothan was. It is hard to date but some suggest a date at the start of the first century BC.



About the times

The book is set during the Assyrian invasion in the sixth century BC, during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar. In fact the opening verse very carefully sets a date to the twelfth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign which was 594 BC.

What were people feeling?

The book of Judith lays out quite clearly what the people were feeling – they were filled with overwhelming and incapacitating fear.

Other books set around this time

2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah.



What kind of Book is it?

This book is widely thought to be historical fiction – set at a time in the past in order to communicate a theological point about trust in God and bravery in the face of opposition.



Look out for...

One of the key questions of Judith is how to face adversity – the people of Bethulia (the city in which Judith lived) were incapacitated with fear; Judith decided to act. Look out for this theme throughout the book.

The story is set as a 'historical' book but most scholars consider it to be fiction. See if you can work out why.



How is it structured?

1.1–3.10	The attack of Nebuchadnezzar
4.1-15	The prayer of Israel
5.1–6.13	Achior, leader of the Ammonites, retells the history of the Israelites (unflatteringly)
6.14-21	The Israelites took their revenge on Achior
7.1-32	The siege of Israel
8.1-36	Judith expresses outrage at what the Assyrians have done
9.1-14	Judith's prayer
10.1–12.9	Judith's plan for revenge
12.10–13.9	The death of Holofernes
13.11–14.10	Judith's triumphant return
14.11–15.7	The victory of Israel
15.8–16.20	The song of Judith
16.21-25	What Judith did next



What could this mean for me?

What do you do at times of overwhelming fear and terror? Reflect on your reactions and how they relate to what happened in this story.



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- Judith is a rare female 'hero' in a biblical book. What did you think about her? Could you relate to her at all?
- Judith was prepared to lie and kill in order to save her people. You might imagine her saying the end justified the means... what do you think?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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