

Source of translations: *The Jerusalem Bible* (1966), edited by Alexander Jones (d. 1970)

INTRODUCTION TO TOBIT, JUDITH AND ESTHER

Although these three books have the literary form of historical stories, the events of which they tell are not attested from other sources and the books are round to treat the facts of history and geography with a good deal of freedom. Plainly they were written to teach lessons of another kind, and some of the early Greek Bibles include them with the wisdom writings.

Tobit, the story of a dutiful son who is given miraculous help by an angel, was written among the Jews of the dispersion, possibly in Egypt, between the 4th and 5th centuries B.C., though the setting of the story is some two hundred years earlier. The book was not accepted into the Hebrew Bible and was recognized by the Church only after a certain hesitancy in the patristic period. In the new translations of the Bible made at the Reformation, it was put in the Apocrypha.

The same treatment was given to the **Book of Judith**, the story of the defeat of Nebuchadnezzar's armies through a woman's single-handed assassination of their commander. It was written about 100 B.C.

The theme of **Esther** is similarly the deliverance of the nation by the actions of a woman. The Hebrew version was probably written about 300 B.C.; the Greek version, which is longer and contains some important additions, is later. In this text, additions adopted from the Greek version are printed in italics. Although the book of Esther has been read and quoted from early days, the Greek passages are "deuterocanonical," their history being the same as that of Tobit and Judith.

TOBIT

¹ **I** The tale of Tobit^a son of Tobiel, son of Ananiel, son of Aduel, son of Gabael,
² of the lineage of Asiel and tribe of Naphtali. ·In the days of Shalmaneser,
king of Assyria, he was exiled from Thisbe, which is south of Kedesh-Naphtali
in Upper Galilee, above Hazor, some distance to the west, north of Shephat.

I. TOBIT THE EXILE

³ I, Tobit, have walked in paths of truth and in good works all the days of my
life. I have given much in alms to my brothers and fellow countrymen, exiled
⁴ like me to Nineveh in the country of Assyria. ·In my young days, when I still
was at home in the country of Israel, the whole tribe of Naphtali my ancestor
broke away from the House of David and from Jerusalem. Yet this was the city
chosen out of all the tribes of Israel for their sacrifices; in this the Temple—God's
⁵ dwelling place—had been built and hallowed for all generations to come. ·But
all my brothers and the House of Naphtali offered sacrifice to the calf that
Jeroboam the king of Israel had made at Dan, on the mountains of Galilee.
⁶ Often I was quite alone in making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, fulfilling the
law that binds all Israel perpetually. I would hurry to Jerusalem with the first
⁷ yield of fruits and beasts, the tithe of cattle and the sheep's first shearings. ·I would
give these to the priests, the sons of Aaron, for the altar. To the Levites
ministering at Jerusalem I would give my tithe of wine and corn, olives, pome-
granates and other fruits. Six years in succession I took the second tithe in money
⁸ and went and paid it at Jerusalem. ·I gave the third to orphans and widows and
to the strangers who live among the Israelites; I brought it them as a gift every
three years. When we ate, we obeyed both the ordinances of the Law of Moses
and the exhortations of Deborah, the mother of our father Ananiel; for my
⁹ father had died and left me an orphan. ·When I came to man's estate, I married
a woman from our kinsmen whose name was Anna; she bore me a son whom
I called Tobias.
¹⁰ When the banishment into Assyria came, I was taken away and went to
¹¹ Nineveh. All my brothers and the men of my race ate the food of the heathen,
¹² but for my part I would not eat the food of the heathen.^b ·And because I had
¹³ kept faith with my God with my whole heart, ·the Most High granted me the
¹⁴ favor of Shalmaneser, and I became the king's purveyor. ·Until his death
¹⁵ I used to travel to Media, where I transacted business on his behalf; and
¹⁶ I deposited sacks of silver worth ten talents with Gabael, the brother of Gabrias,
at Rhages in Media.
¹⁷ On the death of Shalmaneser his son Sennacherib succeeded; the roads into
¹⁸ Media were barred, and I could no longer go there. ·In the days of Shalmaneser
¹⁹ I had often given alms to the brothers of my race; ·I gave my bread to the hungry
²⁰ and clothes to the naked; and I buried, when I saw them, the bodies of my
countrymen thrown over the walls of Nineveh.
²¹ I also buried those who were killed by Sennacherib (for when he retreated
from Judaea in disorder, after the King of heaven had punished his blasphemies,

in his anger Sennacherib killed a great number of Israelites). So I stole their bodies to bury them; Sennacherib looked for them and could not find them.
 19 A Ninevite went and told the king it was I who had buried them secretly. When
 20 I knew that the king had been told about me and saw myself being hunted by men who would put me to death, I was afraid and fled. All my goods were seized; they were all confiscated by the treasury; nothing was left me but my wife Anna and my son Tobias.

21 Less than forty days after this, the king was murdered by his two sons, who
 24 then fled to the mountains of Ararat. His son Esarhaddon succeeded. Ahikar,^c the son of my brother Anael, was appointed chancellor of the exchequer for the
 22 kingdom and given the main ordering of affairs. Ahikar then interceded for me and I was allowed to return to Nineveh, since Ahikar had been chief cup-bearer, keeper of the signet, administrator and treasurer under Sennacherib, king of Assyria, and Esarhaddon had kept him in office. He was a relation of mine; he was my nephew.

II. TOBIT BLINDED

1 **2** In the reign of Esarhaddon, therefore, I returned home, and my wife Anna was restored to me with my son Tobias. At our feast of Pentecost (the feast of Weeks) there was a good dinner. I took my place for the meal; the table was brought to me and various dishes were brought. Then I said to my son Tobias. "Go, my child, and seek out some poor, loyal-hearted man among our brothers exiled in Nineveh, and bring him to share my meal. I will wait until
 3 you come back, my child." So Tobias went out to look for some poor man among our brothers, but he came back again and said, "Father!" I answered, "What is it, my child?" He went on, "Father, one of our nation has just been murdered; he has been strangled and then thrown down in the market place;
 4 he is there still." I sprang up at once, left my meal untouched, took the man from the market place and laid him in one of my rooms, waiting until sunset
 5 to bury him. I came in again and washed myself and ate my bread in sorrow,
 6 remembering the words of the prophet Amos concerning Bethel:

Your feasts will be turned to mourning,
 and all your songs to lamentation.

7 And I wept. When the sun was down, I went and dug a grave and buried him.
 8 My neighbors laughed and said, "See! He is not afraid any more." (You must remember that a price had been set on my head earlier for this very thing.) "The time before this he had to flee, yet here he is, beginning to bury the dead again."

9 That night I took a bath; then I went into the courtyard and lay down by the
 10 courtyard wall. Since it was hot I left my face uncovered. I did not know
 11 that there were sparrows in the wall above my head; their hot droppings fell into my eyes. White spots then formed, which I was obliged to have treated by the doctors. But the more ointments they tried me with, the more the spots blinded me, and in the end I became blind altogether. I remained without sight four years; all my brothers were distressed; and Ahikar provided for my upkeep for two years, till he left for Elymais.

11 My wife Anna then undertook woman's work; she would spin wool and take
 12 cloth to weave; she used to deliver whatever had been ordered from her and then receive payment. Now on March the seventh she finished a piece of work

1 a. This translation follows the Greek. In places where the verse numbering differs from the Vulgate Latin text, the Vulgate verse numbers are added in *italic*. b. Food prepared without regard for the Law's regulations. c. A famous chancellor to Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, kings of Assyria.

20 and delivered it to her customers. They paid her all that was due, and into the
 13 bargain presented her with a kid for a meal. When the kid came into my house,
 21 it began to bleat. I called to my wife and said, "Where does this creature come
 from? Suppose it has been stolen! Quick, let the owners have it back; we have
 14 no right to eat stolen goods." She said, "No, it was a present given me over and
 above my wages." I did not believe her, and told her to give it back to the owners
 22 (I blushed at this in her presence). Then she answered, "What about your own
 alms? What about your own good works? Everyone knows what return you
 1 have had for them." 3 Then, sad at heart, I sighed and wept, and began this
 prayer of lamentation:

2 "You are just, O Lord,
 and just are all your works.
 All your ways are grace and truth,
 and you are the Judge of the world.

3 "Therefore, Lord,
 remember me, look on me.
 Do not punish me for my sins
 or for my heedless faults
 or for those of my fathers.

4 "For we have sinned against you
 and broken your commandments;
 and you have given us over to be plundered,
 to captivity and death,
 to be the talk, the laughingstock and scorn
 of all the nations among who you have dispersed us.

5 "Whereas all your decrees are true
 when you deal with me as my faults deserve,
 and those of my fathers,
 since we have neither kept your commandments
 nor walked in truth before you;
 6 so now, do with me as you will;
 be pleased to take my life from me;
 I desire to be delivered from earth
 and to become earth again.
 For death is better for me than life.
 I have been reviled without a cause
 and I am distressed beyond measure.

"Lord, I wait for the sentence you will give
 to deliver me from this affliction.
 Let me go away to my everlasting home;
 do not turn your face from me, O Lord.
 For it is better to die than still to live
 in the face of trouble that knows no pity;
 I am weary of hearing myself traduced."

III. SARAH

7 It chanced on the same day that Sarah the daughter of Raguel, who lived in
 8 Media at Ecbatana, also heard insults from one of her father's maids. You must
 know that she had been given in marriage seven times, and that Asmodeus,
 that worst of demons, had killed her bridegrooms one after another before ever
 they had slept with her as man with wife. The servant girl said, "Yes, you kill

your bridegrooms yourself. That makes seven already to whom you have been
 9 given, and you have not once been in luck yet. Just because your bridegrooms
 have died, that is no reason for punishing us. Go and join them, and may we be
 10 spared the sight of any child of yours!" That day, she grieved, she sobbed, and
 went up to her father's room intending to hang herself. But then she thought,
 "Suppose they blamed my father! They will say, 'You had an only daughter
 whom you loved, and now she has hanged herself for grief.' I cannot cause my
 father a sorrow which would bring down his old age to the dwelling of the dead.
 I should do better not to hang myself, but to beg the Lord to let me die and
 11 not live to hear any more insults." And at this, by the window with outstretched
 arms she said this prayer:

"You are blessed, O God of mercy!
 May your name be blessed for ever,
 and may all things you have made
 bless you everlastingly.

12
 14 "And now, I lift up my face
 and to you I turn my eyes.
 13
 15 Let your word deliver me from earth;
 I can hear myself traduced no longer.

14
 16 "O Lord, you know
 that I have remained pure;
 no man has touched me;
 15
 17 I have not dishonored your name
 or my father's name
 in this land of exile.

"I am my father's only daughter,
 he has no other child as heir;
 he has no brother at his side,
 nor has he any kinsman left
 for whom I ought to keep myself.

"Already I have lost seven husbands;
 why should I live any longer?
 If it does not please you to take my life,
 then look on me with pity;
 I can hear myself traduced no longer."

16 This time the prayer of each of them found favor before the glory of God,
 24 and Raphael was sent to bring remedy to them both. He was to take the white
 17 spots from the eyes of Tobit, so that he might see God's light with his own eyes;
 25 and he was to give Sarah, the daughter of Raguel, as bride to Tobias son of
 Tobit, and to rid her of Asmodeus, the worst of demons. For it was to Tobias
 before all other suitors that she belonged by right. Tobit was coming back from
 the courtyard into the house at the same moment as Sarah, the daughter of
 Raguel, was coming down from the upper room.

IV. TOBIAS

1 4 The same day, Tobit remembered the silver that he had left with Gabael
 2 at Rhages in Media and thought, "I have come to the point of praying for
 death; I should do well to call my son Tobias and tell him about the money
 3 before I die." He summoned his son Tobias and told him:

“When I die, give me an honorable burial. Honor your mother, and never abandon her all the days of your life. Do all that she wants, and give her no reason for sorrow. Remember, my child, all the risks she ran for your sake when you were in her womb. And when she dies, bury her at my side in the same grave.

“My child, be faithful to the Lord all your days. Never entertain the will to sin or to transgress his laws. Do good works all the days of your life, never follow ways that are not right; for if you act in truthfulness, you will be successful in all your actions, as all men are if they practice what is right.

“Set aside part of your goods for almsgiving. Never turn your face from any poor man and God will never turn his from you. Measure your alms by what you have; if you have much, give more; if you have little, give less, but do not be mean in giving alms. By doing so, you will lay up for yourself a great treasure for the day of necessity. For almsgiving delivers from death and saves men from passing down to darkness. Alms is a most effective offering for all those who give it in the presence of the Most High.

“My child, avoid all loose conduct. Choose a wife of your father’s stock. Do not take a foreign wife outside your father’s tribe, because we are the sons of the prophets. Remember Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, our ancestors from the beginning. All of them took wives from their own kindred, and they were blessed in their children, and their race will inherit the earth. You, too, my child, must prefer your own brothers; never presume to despise your brothers, the sons and daughters of your people; choose your wife from among them. For pride brings ruin and much worry; idleness causes need and poverty, for the mother of famine is idleness.

“Do not keep back until next day the wages of those who work for you; pay them at once. If you serve God you will be rewarded. Be careful, my child, in all you do. Well-disciplined in all your behavior. Do to no one what you would not want done to you. Do not drink wine to the point of drunkenness; do not let excess be your traveling companion.

“Give your bread to those who are hungry, and your clothes to those who are naked. Whatever you own in plenty, devote a proportion to almsgiving; and when you give alms, do not do it grudgingly. Be generous with bread and wine on the graves of virtuous men, but not for the sinner.

“Ask advice of every wise person; never scorn any profitable advice. Bless the Lord God in everything; beg him to guide your ways and bring your paths and purposes to their end. For wisdom is not given to every nation; the Lord himself gives all good things. At his will he lifts up or he casts down to the depths of the dwelling of the dead. So now, my child, remember these precepts and never let them fade from your heart.

“Now, my child, I must tell you I have left ten talents of silver with Gabael son of Gabrias, at Rhages in Media. Do not be afraid, my child, if we have grown poor. You have great wealth if you fear God, if you shun every kind of sin and if you do what is pleasing to the Lord your God.”

V. THE FELLOW TRAVELER OF TOBIAS

Tobias then answered his father Tobit, “Father, I will do everything you have told me. But how am I to recover the money from him? He does not know me, nor I him. What token am I to give him for him to believe me and hand me over the silver? And, besides, I do not know what roads to take for this journey into Media.” Then Tobit answered his son Tobias, “Each of us set his signature to a note which I cut in two, so that each could keep half of it. I took one piece, and put the other with the silver. To think it was twenty years ago I left this silver in his keeping! And now, my child, find some trustworthy man

to travel with you—we will pay him for his time until you arrive back—and then go and collect the money from Gabael.”

⁴₅ Tobias went out to look for a man who knew the way to go with him to Media. Outside he found Raphael the angel standing facing him (though he did not guess he was an angel of God). He said, “Where do you come from, friend?” The angel replied, “I am one of your brother Israelites; I have come to these parts to look for work.” Tobias asked, “Do you know the road to Media?”

⁵₆ The other replied, “Certainly I do. I have been there many times; I know all the ways by heart. I have often been to Media and stayed with Gabael, one of our kinsmen who lives at Rhages in Media. It usually takes two full days to get from Ecbatana to Rhages; Rhages lies in the mountains, and Ecbatana is in the middle of the plain.”^a Tobias said, “Wait for me, friend, while I go and tell my father; I need you to come with me; I will pay you for your time.” The other replied, “Good; I will wait; but do not be long.”

⁷₈ Tobias went in and told his father that he had found one of their brother Israelites. And the father said, “Fetch him in; I want to find out about his family and tribe. I must see if he is going to be a reliable companion for you, my child.” So Tobias went out and called him. “Friend,” he said, “my father wants you.”

⁹₁₀ The angel came into the house; Tobit greeted him, and the other answered, wishing him happiness. Tobit replied, “Can I ever be happy again? I am a blind man; I no longer see the light of heaven; I am sunk in darkness like the dead who see the light no more. I am a man buried alive; I hear men speak but cannot see them.” The angel said, “Take comfort; before long God will heal you. Take comfort.”

¹¹₁₂ Tobit said, “My son Tobias wishes to go to Media. Will you join him as his guide? Brother, I will pay you.” He replied, “I am willing to go with him; I know all the ways; I have often been to Media, I have crossed all its plains and mountains, and I know all the roads.” Tobit said, “Brother, what family and what tribe do you belong to? Will you tell me, brother?” “What does my tribe matter to you?” the angel said. Tobit said, “I want to be quite sure whose son you are and what your name is.”

¹³₁₄ The angel said, “I am Azarias, son of the great Ananias, one of your kinsmen.” “Welcome and greetings, brother! Do not be offended at my wanting to know the name of your family; I find you are my kinsman, of a good and honorable line. I know Ananias and Jathan, the two sons of the great Shemaiah. They used to go to Jerusalem with me; we have worshiped together there, and they have never strayed from the right path. Your brothers are worthy men; you come of good stock; welcome.”

¹⁵₁₆ He went on, “I engage you at a drachma a day, with your expenses, like my own son. Complete the journey with my son, and I will go beyond the agreed wage.” The angel replied, “I will complete the journey with him. Do not be afraid. On the journey outward all will be well; on the journey back all will be well; the road is safe.” Tobit said, “Blessings on you, brother.” Then he turned to his son. “My child,” he said, “prepare what you need for the journey, and set off with your brother. May God in heaven protect you abroad and bring you both back to me safe and sound! May his angel go with you and protect you, my child!”

¹⁷₁₈ Tobias left the house to set out and kissed his father and mother. Tobit said, “A happy journey!” His mother burst into tears and said to Tobit, “Why must you send my child away? Is he not the staff of our hands, with his errands to and fro for us? Surely money is not the only thing that matters? Surely it is not as precious as our child? The way of life God had already given us was good enough.” He said, “Do not think such thoughts. Going away and coming back, all will be well with our child. On the day of his homecoming you will see for yourself how all is still well with him. Do not think such thoughts; do not worry on their account, my sister. A good angel will go with him; he will have a good journey and come back to us well and happy.” ¹⁹₂₀ ²¹₂₂ ²³₂₄ ²⁵₂₆ ²⁷₂₈ ¹₂ ³₄ ⁵₆ And she dried her tears.

VI. THE FISH

² The boy left with the angel, and the dog followed behind. The two walked on,
³ and when the first evening came they camped beside the Tigris. The boy had
 gone down to the river to wash his feet, when a great fish leaped out of the water
^{3,4} and all but swallowed his foot. The boy gave a shout and the angel said, "Catch
 the fish; do not let it go." The boy mastered the fish and pulled it on to the bank.
⁵ The angel said, "Cut it open; take out the gall, the heart and the liver; set these
 aside and throw the entrails away, for the gall and heart and liver have curative
⁶ properties." The boy cut the fish open and took out the gall and heart and liver.
 He fried part of the fish for his meal and kept some for salting. Then they walked
 on again together until they were nearly in Media.

⁷ Then the boy asked the angel this question, "Brother Azarias, what can the
⁸ fish's heart, liver and gall cure?" He replied, "You burn the fish's heart and
 liver, and their smoke is used in the case of a man or woman plagued by a demon
⁹ or evil spirit; any such affliction disappears for good, leaving no trace. As
 regards the gall, this is used as an eye ointment for anyone having white spots
 on his eyes; after using it, you only have to blow on the spots to cure them."

¹⁰ They entered Media and had nearly reached Ecbatana when Raphael said
¹¹ to the boy, "Brother Tobias." "Yes?" he answered. The angel went on, "Tonight
 we shall be staying with Raguel, who is a kinsman of yours. He has a daughter
¹² called Sarah, but apart from Sarah he has no other son or daughter. Now you
 are her next of kin; she belongs to you before anyone else and you may claim
 her father's inheritance. She is a thoughtful, courageous and very lovely girl,
¹³ and her father loves her dearly. You have the right to marry her. Listen, brother;
 this very evening I will speak about the girl to her father and arrange for her
 to be betrothed to you, and when we come back from Rhages we can celebrate
 the marriage. I assure you, Raguel has no right whatever to refuse you or to
 betroth her to anyone else. That would be asking for death, as prescribed in the
 Book of Moses, once he was aware that kinship gives you the pre-eminent right
 to marry his daughter. So listen, brother. This very evening we will speak about
 the girl and ask for her hand in marriage. When we come back from Rhages we
 will fetch her and take her home with us."

¹⁴ Tobias answered Raphael, "Brother Azarias, I have been told that she has
 already been given in marriage seven times and that each time her bridegroom
 has died in the bridal room. He died the same night as he entered her room;
¹⁵ and I have heard people say it was a demon that killed them, and this makes
 me a little afraid. He does no harm to her, of course, because he loves her; but
 as soon as a man tries to approach her, he kills him. I am my father's only son,
 and I have no wish to die; I shrink from causing my father and mother a grief
¹⁶ that would bring them to the grave; they have no other son to bury them." The
 angel said, "Are you going to forget your father's advice? After all, he urged
 you to choose a wife from your father's family. Listen then, brother. Do not
 worry about the demon; take her. This very evening, I promise, she will be given
¹⁷ you as your wife. Then once you are in the bridal room, take the heart and
 liver of the fish and lay a little of it on the burning incense. The reek will rise,
¹⁸ the demon will smell it and flee, and there is no danger that he will ever be found
 near the girl again. Then, before you sleep together, first stand up, both of you,
 and pray. Ask the Lord of heaven to grant you his grace and protection. Do not
 be afraid; she was destined for you from the beginning, and it is you who will
 save her. She will follow you, and I pledge my word she will give you children
 who will be like brothers to you. Do not hesitate." And when Tobias heard
 Raphael say this, when he understood that Sarah was his sister, a kinswoman of
 his father's family, he fell so deeply in love with her that he could no longer call
 his heart his own.

VII. RAGUEL

1 **7** As they entered Ecbatana, Tobias said, "Brother Azarias, take me at once to our brother Raguel's." And he showed him the way to the house of Raguel, whom they found sitting beside his courtyard door. They greeted him first, and he replied, "Welcome and greetings, brothers." And he took them into his house.

2 He said to his wife Edna, "How like my brother Tobit this young man is!" Edna asked them where they came from; they said, "We are sons of Naphtali exiled in Nineveh." "Do you know our brother Tobit?" "Yes." "How is he?" "He is still alive and he is well." And Tobias added, "He is my father." Raguel leaped to his feet and kissed him and wept. Then finding words, he said, "Blessings on you, child! You are the son of a noble father. How sad it is that someone so virtuous and full of good deeds should have gone blind!" He fell on the neck of his kinsman Tobias and wept. And his wife Edna wept for him, and so did his daughter Sarah. Raguel killed a sheep from the flock, and they gave them a warmhearted welcome.

They washed and bathed and sat down to table. Then Tobias said to Raphael, "Brother Azarias, will you ask Raguel to give me my sister Sarah?" Raguel overheard the words, and said to the young man, "Eat and drink, and make the most of your evening; no one else has the right to take my daughter Sarah—no one but you, my brother. In any case I, for my own part, am not at liberty to give her to anyone else, since you are her next of kin. However, my boy, I must be frank with you: I have tried to find a husband for her seven times among our kinsmen, and all of them have died the first evening, on going to her room. But for the present, my boy, eat and drink; the Lord will grant you his grace and peace." Tobias spoke out, "I will not hear of eating and drinking till you have come to a decision about me." Raguel answered, "Very well. Since, as prescribed by the Book of Moses, she is given to you, heaven itself decrees she shall be yours. I therefore entrust your sister to you. From now you are her brother and she is your sister. She is given to you from today for ever. The Lord of heaven favor you tonight, my child, and grant you his grace and peace."

12 Raguel called for his daughter Sarah, took her by the hand and gave her to Tobias with these words, "I entrust her to you; the law and the ruling recorded in the Book of Moses assign her to you as your wife. Take her; take her home to your father's house with a good conscience. The God of heaven grant you a good journey in peace." Then he turned to her mother and asked her to fetch him writing paper. He drew up the marriage contract, how he gave his daughter as bride to Tobias according to the ordinance in the Law of Moses.

14, 15 After this they began to eat and drink. Raguel called his wife Edna and said, "My sister, prepare the second room and take her there." She went and made the bed in this room as he had ordered, and took her daughter to it. She wept over her, then wiped away her tears and said, "Courage, daughter! May the Lord of heaven turn your grief to joy! Courage, daughter!" And she went out.

VIII. THE GRAVE

1 **8** When they had finished eating and drinking and it seemed time to go to bed, the young man was taken from the dining room to the bedroom. Tobias remembered Raphael's advice; he went to his bag, took the fish's heart and liver out of it and put some on the burning incense. The reek of the fish distressed the demon, who fled through the air to Egypt. Raphael pursued him there, and bound and shackled him at once.

4 The parents meanwhile had gone out and shut the door behind them. Tobias rose from the bed, and said to Sarah, "Get up, my sister! You and I must pray

⁵ and petition our Lord to win his grace and his protection.” •She stood up, and
⁷ they began praying for protection, and this was how he began:

“You are blessed, O God of our fathers;
 blessed, too, is your name
 for ever and ever.
 Let the heavens bless you
 and all things you have made
 for evermore.

⁶
⁸ It was you who created Adam,
 you who created Eve his wife
 to be his help and support;
 and from these two the human race was born.
 It was you who said,
*‘It is not good that the man should be alone;
 let us make him a helpmate like himself.’*
⁷
⁹ And so I do not take my sister
 for any lustful motive;
 I do it in singleness of heart.
 Be kind enough to have pity on her and on me
 and bring us to old age together.”

⁸ And together they said, “Amen, Amen,” •and lay down for the night.

¹¹ But Raguel rose and called his servants, who came and helped him to dig
¹⁰ a grave. •He had thought, “Heaven grant he does not die! We should be over-
¹²whelmed with ridicule and shame.” •When the grave was finished, Raguel went
¹¹ back to the house, called his wife •and said, “Will you send a maid to the room
¹³ to see if Tobias is still alive? For if he is dead, we may be able to bury him without
¹⁴ anyone else knowing.” •The maid was called, the lamp lit and the door opened;
¹³ the maid went in. She found the two fast asleep; •she came out again and
¹⁴ whispered, “He is not dead; all is well.” •Then Raguel blessed the God of heaven
¹⁵ with these words:

“You are blessed, my God,
 with every blessing that is pure;
 may you be blessed for evermore!

¹⁶ “You are blessed for having made me glad.
 What I feared has not happened;
 instead you have treated us
 with mercy beyond all measure.

¹⁷
¹⁹ “You are blessed for taking pity
 on this only son, this only daughter.
 Grant them, Master, your grace and your protection;
 let them live out their lives
 in happiness and in grace.”

¹⁸ And he made his servants fill the grave in before dawn broke.

²⁰ He told his wife to make plenty of bread; he went to his flock, brought back
 two oxen and four sheep and gave orders for them to be cooked; and preparations
²³ began. •He called Tobias and said, “I will not hear of your leaving here for
 a fortnight. You are to stay where you are, eating and drinking, with me. You
²¹ will make my daughter happy again after all her troubles. •After that, take away
²⁴ a half of all I have, and go without let or hindrance back to your father. When
 my wife and I are dead you will have the other half. Courage, my boy! I am your
 father, and Edna is your mother. We are your parents in future, as we are your
 sister’s. Courage, my son!”

IX. THE WEDDING FEAST

¹²³ **9** Then Tobias turned to Raphael. "Brother Azarias," he said, "take four servants and two camels and leave for Rhages. Go to Gabael's house, give him the receipt and see about the money; then invite him to come with you to my wedding feast. You know that my father must be counting the days and that I cannot lose a single one without worrying him. You see what Raguel has pledged himself to do; I am bound by his oath." So Raphael left for Rhages in Media with the four servants and two camels. They stayed with Gabael, and Raphael showed him the receipt. He told him about the marriage of Tobias son of Tobit and gave him his invitation to the wedding feast. Gabael started counting out the sacks to him—the seals were intact—and they loaded them on to the camels. ⁶ Early in the morning they set off together for the feast, and reached Raguel's house where they found Tobias dining. He rose to greet Gabael, who burst into tears and blessed him with the words, "Excellent son of a father beyond reproach, just and generous in his dealings! The Lord give heaven's blessing to you, to your wife, to the father and mother of your wife! Blessed be God for granting me the sight of this living image of my cousin Tobit!"

¹ **10** Every day, meanwhile, Tobit kept reckoning the days required for the journey there and the journey back. The full number went by, and still ² his son had not come. Then he thought, "I hope he has not been delayed there! I hope Gabael is not dead! Perhaps no one was there to give him the money." ³ And he began to worry. His wife Anna kept saying, "My son is dead! He is no longer among the living!" And she began to weep and mourn over her son. She ⁵ kept saying. "Alas! I let you leave me, my child, you, the light of my eyes." ⁶ And Tobit would reply, "Hush, my sister! Do not think such thoughts. All is well with him. Something has happened there to delay them. His companion is someone we can trust, one of our kinsmen at that. Do not lose heart, my sister. ⁷ He will be here soon." But she only said, "Leave me alone; do not try to deceive me. My child is dead." And every day she would go abruptly out to watch the road by which her son had left. She trusted no eyes but her own. Once the sun had set she would come home again, only to weep and moan all night, unable to sleep.

After the fourteen days of feasting that Raguel had sworn to keep for his daughter's marriage, Tobias came to him and said, "Let me go now; my father and mother must have lost all hope of seeing me again. So I beg you, father, to let me return to my father's house; I have told you the plight he was in when ⁸ I left him." Raguel said to Tobias, "Stay, my son, stay with me. I will send ⁹ messengers to your father Tobit to give him news of you." But Tobias pressed ¹⁰ him, "No. I ask your permission to go back to my father's house." Without more ado, Raguel committed Sarah his bride into his keeping. He gave Tobias half his wealth, menservants and maidservants, oxen and sheep, donkeys and ¹¹ camels, clothes and money and household things. And so he let them leave happily. To Tobias he said these parting words, "Good health, my son, and a happy journey! May the Lord of heaven be gracious to you and to your wife ¹² Sarah! I hope to see your children before I die." To his daughter Sarah he said, "Go now to your father-in-law's house, since henceforward they are as much your parents as those who gave you life. Go in peace, my Daughter, I hope to hear nothing but good of you, as long as I live." He said good-by to them and let them go.

Edna in her turn said to Tobias, "Dear son and brother, may it please the Lord to bring you back again! I hope to live long enough to see the children of you and my daughter Sarah before I die. In the sight of the Lord I give my daughter into your keeping. Never make her unhappy as long as you live. Go in peace, my son. Henceforward I am your mother and Sarah is your sister. May

¹² we all live happily all the days of our lives!" And she kissed them both and saw them set out happily.

¹³ Tobias left Raguel's house with his mind at ease. In his gladness he blessed the Lord of heaven and earth, the King of all that is, for the happy issue of his travels. He gave this blessing to Raguel and his wife Edna, "May it be my happiness to honor you all the days of my life!"

X. TOBIT'S SIGHT RESTORED

¹²³ **11** They were nearly at Kaserin, opposite Nineveh, when Raphael said, "You know the plight in which we left your father; let us go on ahead of your wife and prepare the house ourselves while she travels behind with the others."

⁴ They went on together (Raphael had warned Tobias to take the gall with him) and the dog followed them.

⁵⁶ Anna was sitting, watching the road by which her son would come. She was sure at once it must be he and said to the father, "Here comes your son, with his companion."

⁷ Raphael said to Tobias before he reached his father, "I give you my word ⁸ that your father's eyes will open. You must put the fish's gall to his eyes; the medicine will smart and will draw a filmy white skin off his eyes. And your father will be able to see and look on the light."

⁹ The mother ran forward and threw her arms around her son's neck. "Now ¹⁰ I can die," she said, "I have seen you again." And she wept. Tobit rose to his feet and stumbled across the courtyard through the door. Tobias came on toward ¹¹ him (he had the fish's gall in his hand). He blew into his eyes and said, steadying ¹² him, "Take courage, father!" With this he applied the medicine, left it there ¹³ a while, then with both hands peeled away a filmy skin from the corners of his ¹⁴ eyes. Then his father fell on his neck and wept. He exclaimed, "I can see, my son, the light of my eyes!" And he said:

¹⁷ "Blessed be God!
Blessed be his great name!
Blessed be all his holy angels!
Blessed be his great name
for evermore!
¹⁵ For he had scourged me
and now has had pity on me
and I see my son Tobias."

Tobias went into the house, and with a loud voice joyfully blessed God. Then he told his father everything: how his journey had been successful and he had brought the silver back; how he had married Sarah, the daughter of Raguel; how she was following him now, close behind, and could not be far from the gates of Nineveh.

¹⁶ Tobit set off to the gates of Nineveh to meet his daughter-in-law, giving joyful praise to God as he went. When the people of Nineveh saw him walking without ¹⁷ a guide and stepping forward as briskly as of old, they were astonished. Tobit described to them how God had taken pity on him and had opened his eyes. Then Tobit met Sarah, the bride of his son Tobias, and blessed her in these words, "Welcome, daughter! Blessed be your God for sending you to us, my daughter. Blessings on your father, blessings on my son Tobias, blessings on yourself, my daughter. Welcome now to your own house in joyfulness and in blessedness. Come in, my daughter." He held a feast that day for all the Jews of ¹⁸ Nineveh, and his cousins Ahikar and Nadab came to share in Tobit's happiness. ²⁰

XI. RAPHAEL

1 **12** When the feasting was over, Tobit called his son Tobias and said, "My son,
 2 you ought to think about paying the amount due to your fellow traveler;
 3 give him more than the figure agreed on." "Father," he replied, "how much am
 4 I to give him for his help? Even if I give him half the goods he brought back with
 5 me, I shall not be the loser. He has brought me back to you safe and sound,
 6 he has cured my wife, he has brought the money back too, and now he has
 7 cured you as well. How much am I to give him for all this?" Tobit said, "He has
 8 richly earned half of what he brought back." So Tobias called his companion
 9 and said, "Take half of what you brought back, in payment for all you have
 10 done, and go in peace."

11 Then Raphael took them both aside and said, "Bless God, utter his praise
 12 before all the living for all the favors he has given you. Bless and extol his
 13 name. Proclaim before all men the deeds of God as they deserve, and never tire
 14 of giving him thanks. It is right to keep the secret of a king, yet right to reveal
 15 and publish the works of God. Thank him worthily. Do what is good, and no
 16 evil can befall you.

17 "Prayer with fasting and alms with right conduct are better than riches with
 18 iniquity. Better to practice almsgiving than to hoard up gold. Almsgiving saves
 19 from death and purges every kind of sin. Those who give alms have their fill
 20 of days; those who commit sin and do evil, bring harm on themselves.

21 "I am going to tell you the whole truth, hiding nothing from you. I have
 22 already told you that it is right to keep the secret of a king, yet right too to reveal
 23 in worthy fashion the works of God. So you must know that when you and
 24 Sarah were at prayer, it was I who offered your supplications before the glory
 25 of the Lord and who read them; so too when you were burying the dead. When
 26 you did not hesitate to get up and leave the table to go and bury a dead man,
 27 I was sent to test your faith, and at the same time God sent me to heal you
 28 and your daughter-in-law Sarah. I am Raphael, one of the seven^a angels who
 29 stand ever ready to enter the presence of the glory of the Lord."

30 They were both overwhelmed with awe; they fell on their faces in terror.
 31 But the angel said, "Do not be afraid; peace be with you. Bless God for ever.
 32 As far as I was concerned, when I was with you, my presence was not by any
 33 decision of mine, but by the will of God; it is he whom you must bless throughout
 34 your days, he that you must praise. You thought you saw me eating, but that
 35 was appearance and no more. Now bless the Lord on earth and give thanks to
 36 God. I am about to return to him above who sent me. Write down all that has
 37 happened." And he rose in the air. When they stood up again, he was no longer
 38 visible. They praised God with hymns; they thanked him for having performed
 39 such wonders; had not an angel of God appeared to them?

XII. ZION

1 **13** And he said:

"Blessed be God who lives for ever,
 for his reign endures throughout all ages!

2 By turns he punishes and pardons;
 he sends men down to the depths of the underworld
 and draws them up from supreme Destruction;
 no one can escape his hand.

3 Declare his praise before the nations,

you who are the sons of Israel!
 For if he has scattered you among them,
 4 there too he has shown you his greatness.
 Extol him before all the living;
 he is our Master
 and he is our God
 and he is our Father
 and he is God for ever and ever.

5 "Though he punishes you for your iniquities,
 he will take pity on you all;
 he will gather you from every nation
 wherever you have been scattered.

6 If you return to him
 with all your heart and all your soul,
 behaving honestly toward him,
 then he will return to you
 and hide his face from you no longer.
 Consider how well he has treated you;
 loudly give him thanks.
 Bless the Lord of justice
 and extol the King of the ages.

7 I for my part sing his praise
 in the country of my exile;
 I make his power and greatness known
 to a nation that has sinned.

8 Sinners, return to him;
 let your conduct be upright before him;
 perhaps he will be gracious to you
 and take pity on you.

9 I for my part extol God
 and my soul rejoices
 in the King of heaven.

8 Let his greatness be in all men's mouths,
 his praises be sung in Jerusalem.

9
 11 "Jerusalem, Holy City,
 God scourged you for your handiwork
 yet still will take pity on the sons of the upright.
 10
 12 Thank the Lord as he deserves
 and bless the King of the ages,
 that your Temple may be rebuilt with joy within you
 and within you he may comfort every exile,
 and within you he may love all those who are distressed,
 for all generations to come.

11
 13 "A bright light shall shine
 over all the regions of the earth;
 14 many nations shall come from far away,
 from all the ends of the earth,
 to dwell close to the holy name of the Lord God,
 with gifts in their hands for the King of heaven.
 Within you, generation after generation
 shall proclaim their joy,
 and the name of her who is Elect shall endure
 through the generations to come.

12
 16 "Cursed be any who affront you,

cursed be any who destroy you,
 who throw down your walls,
 who raze your towers,
 who burn your houses!
 Blessed for ever be all who build you!
 Then you will exult, and rejoice
 over the sons of the upright,
 for they will all have been gathered in
 and will bless the Lord of the ages.

13
1714
18

“Happy are those who love you,
 happy those who rejoice over your peace,
 happy those who have mourned
 over all your punishment!
 For they will soon rejoice within you,
 witnessing all your blessedness in days to come.
 My soul blesses the Lord, the great King,
 because Jerusalem shall be built anew
 and his house for ever and ever.

15
19
16

20

“What bliss if one of my blood is left
 to see your glory and praise the King of heaven!
 The gates of Jerusalem shall be built
 of sapphire and of emerald,
 and all your walls of precious stone;
 the towers of Jerusalem shall be built of gold
 and their battlements of pure gold.’

21

17

The streets of Jerusalem shall be paved
 with ruby and with stones from Ophir;
 the gates of Jerusalem will resound
 with songs of exultation;
 and all her houses will say,

23

‘Alleluia! Blessed be the God of Israel.’
 Within you they will bless the holy name
 for ever and for ever.”

¹ 14 The end of the hymns of Tobit.

XIII. NINEVEH

² Tobit died in peace when he was a hundred and twelve years old and received
³ an honorable burial in Nineveh. ‘He was sixty-two when he went blind; and
⁴ after his cure he lived from then on in comfort, practicing almsgiving and
⁵ continually praising God and extolling his greatness. ‘When he was at the
⁶ point of death he summoned his son Tobias and gave him these instructions,
 “My son, take your children and hurry away to Media, since I believe the word
 of God pronounced over Nineveh by Nahum. Everything will come true,
 everything happen that the emissaries of God, the prophets of Israel, have
 predicted against Assyria and Nineveh; not one of their words shall prove empty.
 It will all take place in due time. You will be safer in Media than in Assyria
 or in Babylonia. Since I for my part know and believe that everything God has
 said will come true; so it will be, and not a word of the prophecies shall fail.

“A census will be taken of our brothers living in the land of Israel and they
 will be exiled far from their own fair country. The entire territory of Israel will
 become a desert, and Samaria and Jerusalem will become a desert, and the

5 house of God, for a time, will be laid waste and burned. Then once again God will take pity on them and bring them back to the land of Israel. They will rebuild his house, although it will be less beautiful than the first, until the time has fully come. But after this, all will return from captivity and rebuild Jerusalem in all her glory, and the house of God will be rebuilt within her as the prophets of 6 Israel have foretold. And all the people of the whole earth will be converted and will fear God with all sincerity. All will renounce their false gods who have 7 led them astray into error, and will bless the God of the ages by upright conduct. All the Israelites spared in those days will remember God in sincerity of heart. They will come and gather in Jerusalem and thereafter dwell securely in the land of Abraham, which shall be their own. And those who sincerely love God shall rejoice. And those who commit sin and wickedness shall vanish from the earth.

⁸ 10 "And now, my children, I lay this duty on you: serve God sincerely, and do 11 what is pleasing to him. And lay on your children the obligation to behave uprightly, to give alms, to keep God in mind and to bless his name always, sincerely and with all their might.

⁹ 10 "So then, my son, leave Nineveh; do not stay here. As soon as you have 13 buried your mother next to me, go the same day, whenever it may be, and do not linger in this country where I see wickedness and perfidy unashamedly triumphant. Consider, my child, all that Nadab did to his foster father Ahikar. Was he not forced to go underground, though still a living man? But God made the criminal pay for his outrage before the eyes of his victim, since Ahikar came back to the light of day, while Nadab went down to everlasting darkness in punishment for plotting against Ahikar's life. Because of his good works Ahikar escaped the deadly snare Nadab had laid for him, and Nadab fell into it to his 11 own ruin. So, my children, you see what comes of almsgiving, and what wickedness leads to, I mean to death. But now breath fails me."

They laid him back on his bed; he died and was buried with honor.

¹² 14 When his mother died, Tobias buried her beside his father. Then he left for Media with his wife and children. He lived in Ecbatana with Raguel, his father-in-law. He treated the aging parents of his wife with every care and respect, 13 and later buried them in Ecbatana in Media. Tobias inherited the patrimony 14 of Raguel besides that of his father Tobit. Much honored, he lived to the age 15 of a hundred and seventeen years. Before he died he witnessed the ruin of Nineveh. He saw the Ninevites taken prisoner and deported to Media by Cyaxares king of Media. He blessed God for everything he inflicted on the Ninevites and Assyrians. Before his death he had the opportunity of rejoicing over the fate of Nineveh, and he blessed the Lord God for ever and ever. Amen.

JUDITH

I. THE CAMPAIGN OF HOLOFERNES

Nebuchadnezzar and Arphaxad^a

¹ **1** It was the twelfth year of Nebuchadnezzar^b who reigned over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh. Arphaxad was then reigning over the Medes at ² Ecbatana. He surrounded this city with walls of dressed stones three cubits thick and six cubits long, making the rampart seventy cubits high and fifty ³ cubits wide. At the gates he placed towers one hundred cubits high and, at the ⁴ foundations, sixty cubits wide, the gates themselves being seventy cubits high and forty wide to allow his forces to march out in a body and his infantry to parade freely.

⁵ Now at this time King Nebuchadnezzar gave battle to King Arphaxad in the ⁶ great plain lying in the territory of Ragae. Supporting him were all the peoples from the highlands, all from the Euphrates and Tigris and Hydaspes, and those from the plains who were subject to Arioch, king of the Elymaeans. Thus many nations had mustered to take part in the battle of the sons of Cheleoud.^c

⁷ Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians sent a message to all the inhabitants of Persia, to all the inhabitants of the western countries, Cilicia, Damascus, ⁸ Lebanon, Anti-Lebanon, to all those along the coast, to the peoples of Carmel, ⁹ Gilead, Upper Galilee, the great plain of Esdraelon, to the men of Samaria and its outlying towns, to those beyond Jordan, as far away as Jerusalem Bethany, Chelous, Kadesh, the river of Egypt, Tahpanhes, Rameses and the ¹⁰ whole territory of Goshen, beyond Tanis, too, and Memphis, and to all the ¹¹ inhabitants of Egypt as far as the frontiers of Ethiopia. But the inhabitants of these countries ignored the summons of Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians and did not rally to him to make war. They were not afraid of him, since in their view he appeared isolated. Hence they sent his ambassadors back with nothing ¹² achieved and in disgrace. Nebuchadnezzar was furious with all these countries. He swore by his throne and kingdom to take revenge on all the territories of Cilicia, Damascene and Syria, of the Moabites and of the Ammonites, of Judaea and Egypt as far as the limits of the two seas, and to ravage them with the sword.

The campaign against Arphaxad

¹³ In the seventeenth year he and his forces gave battle to King Arphaxad and in this battle defeated him. He routed Arphaxad's entire army and all his cavalry ¹⁴ and chariots; he occupied his towns and advanced on Ecbatana; he seized its towers and plundered its market places, reducing its former magnificence to a mockery. He later captured Arphaxad in the mountains of Ragae and, thrusting ¹⁵ him through with his spears, destroyed him once and for all.

1 a. This translation follows the Greek. In places where the verse numbering differs from the Vulgate Latin text, the Vulgate verse numbers are added in *italic*. **b.** Nebuchadnezzar stands for "the enemy of God's people, Israel"; historically he was king of Babylon and was never styled "king of Assyria," and Nineveh was not his capital city. **c.** Probably the Chaldeans.

16 He then retired with his troops and all who had joined forces with him: a vast horde of armed men. Then, carefree, he and his army gave themselves up to feasting for a hundred and twenty days.

The campaign in the west

1 **2** In the eighteenth year,^a on the twenty-second day of the first month, a rumor ran through the palace that Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians was to have his revenge on the whole world, as he had threatened. •Summoning his general staff and senior officers he held a secret conference with them, and with his own lips pronounced utter destruction on all these countries. •It was then decreed that everyone should be put to death who had not answered the king's appeal.

4 When the council was over, Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians sent for Holofernes,^b general-in-chief of his armies and subordinate only to himself. 5 He said to him, "Thus speaks the Great King, lord of the whole world: 'Be on your way; take men of proved valor, about a hundred and twenty thousand foot soldiers and a strong contingent of horse with twelve thousand 6 cavalymen; •then advance against the western lands, since these people have 7 disregarded my call. •Bid them have earth and water ready, because in my rage I am about to march on them; the feet of my soldiers will cover the whole face of the 8 earth, and I will plunder it. •Their wounded will fill the valleys and the torrents 9 and rivers, blocked with their dead, will overflow. •I will lead them captive 10 to the ends of the earth. •Now go! Begin by conquering this whole region for me. If they surrender to you, hold them for me until the time comes to punish them. 11 But if they resist, look on no one with clemency. Hand them over to slaughter 12 and plunder throughout the territory entrusted to you. •For by my life and by the living power of my kingdom, I have spoken. All this I will do indeed. 13 And you, neglect none of your master's commands, act strictly according to my orders without further delay.'"

14 Leaving the presence of his sovereign, Holofernes immediately summoned 15 all the marshals, generals and officers of the Assyrian army and detailed the picked troops as his master had ordered, about a hundred and twenty thousand 16 men and a further twelve thousand mounted bowmen. •He organized these in the 17 normal battle formation. •He then secured vast numbers of camels, donkeys 18 and mules to carry the baggage, and innumerable sheep, oxen and goats for 19 food supplies. •Every man received full rations and a generous sum of gold and silver from the king's purse.

19 He then set out for the campaign with his whole army, in advance of King 20 Nebuchadnezzar, to overwhelm the whole western region with his chariots, his horsemen and his picked body of foot. •A composite corps brought up the rear, as numerous as locusts or the grains of sand on the ground; there was no counting their multitude.

The stages of Holofernes' advance

21 Thus they set out from Nineveh and marched for three days toward the plain 22 of Bectileth. From Bectileth they went on to pitch camp near the mountains that lie to the north of Upper Cilicia. •From there Holofernes advanced into 23 the highlands with his whole army, infantry, horsemen, chariots. •He cut his 24 way through Put and Lud, stripped all the sons of Rassis and sons of Ishmael 25 living on the verge of the desert south of Cheleon, •marched along the Euphrates, crossed Mesopotamia, razed all the fortified towns controlling the wadi Abron 26 and reached the sea. •Next he attacked the territories of Cilicia, butchering 27 all who offered him resistance, advanced on the southern frontiers of Japheth, facing Arabia, •completely encircled the Midianites, burned their tents and 27 plundered their sheep runs, •made his way down to the Damascus plain in the time of the wheat harvest, set fire to the fields, destroyed the flocks and herds,

sacked the towns, laid the countryside waste and put all the young men to the sword. Fear and trembling seized all the coastal peoples. The populations of Sidon and Tyre, of Sur, Ocina, Jamnia, Azotus, Ascalon, were panic-stricken.

¹ **3** They therefore sent envoys to him to sue for peace and say, "We are servants of the great King Nebuchadnezzar and we lie prone before you. Treat us as you think fit. Our cattle farms, all our land, all our wheat fields, our flocks and herds, all the sheep runs in our encampments are at your disposal. Do with them as you please. Our towns and their inhabitants, too, are at your service; go and advance against them if such is your good pleasure." These men came to Holofernes and delivered the message as above.

⁶ He then made his way down to the coast with his army and stationed ⁷ garrisons in all the fortified towns, levying outstanding men there as auxiliaries.

⁷ The people of these cities and of all the other towns in the neighborhood ⁹ welcomed him, wearing garlands and dancing to the sound of tambourines.

^{11,12} ⁸ Notwithstanding this, he demolished their shrines and cut down their sacred ¹³ trees, carrying out his commission to destroy all local gods and to force the nations to worship Nebuchadnezzar alone and to compel men of every language and nationality to hail him as a god.^a

⁹ Thus he reached the edge of Esdraelon, in the neighborhood of Dothan, ¹⁰ a village facing the great ridge of Judaea. He pitched camp between Geba and Scythopolis and stayed there a full month to replenish his supplies.

Judaea on the alert

¹ **4** When the Israelites living in Judaea heard how Holofernes, general-in-chief of Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians, had treated the various nations, ² first plundering their temples and then destroying them, they were thoroughly alarmed at his approach and trembled for Jerusalem and the Temple of the ³ Lord their God. They had returned from captivity only a short time before, and the resettlement of the people in Judaea and the reconsecration of the sacred furnishings, of the altar, and of the Temple, which had been profaned, were of recent date.^a

⁴ They therefore alerted the whole of Samaria, Kona, Beth-horon, Belmain, ⁵ Jericho, Choba, Aesora and the Salem valley. They occupied the summits of ⁴ the highest mountains and fortified the villages on them; they laid in supplies ⁵ for the coming war, as the fields had just been harvested. Joakim the high priest, resident in Jerusalem at the time, wrote to the inhabitants of Bethulia and of Betomesthaim, two towns facing Esdraelon, toward the plain of ⁷ Dothan. He ordered them to occupy the mountain passes, the only means of ⁶ access to Judaea, for there it would be easy for them to halt an attacking force, the narrowness of the approach not allowing men to advance more than two ⁸ abreast. The Israelites carried out the orders of Joakim the high priest and of ⁷ the people's Council of Elders in session at Jerusalem.

A nation at prayer

⁹ All the men of Israel cried most fervently to God and humbled themselves ⁸ before him. They, their wives, their children, their cattle, all their resident ⁹ aliens, hired or slave, wrapped sackcloth around their loins. All the Israelites in ¹¹ Jerusalem, including the women and children, lay prone in front of the Temple, and with ashes on their heads stretched out their hands before the Lord. They ¹² draped the very altar in sackcloth and fervently joined together in begging the God of Israel not to let their little ones be massacred, their wives carried off,

² a. The eighteenth year of his reign was 587, in which he captured Jerusalem. b. The name of an officer under King Artaxerxes III. c. Title of the Persian kings.

³ a. Neither Assyrian nor Babylonian kings claimed divine honors.

⁴ a. Historically, the return from Exile and the repopulation of Jerusalem were in 539-400. Nebuchadnezzar had died in 562.

the towns of their heritage destroyed, the Temple profaned and desecrated for the heathen to gloat over it. The Lord heard them and looked kindly on their distress.

The people fasted for many days throughout Judaea as well as in Jerusalem before the sanctuary of the Lord Almighty. Joakim the high priest and all who stood before the Lord, the Lord's priests and ministers, wore sackcloth around their loins as they offered the perpetual holocaust and the votive and voluntary offerings of the people. With ashes on their turbans they earnestly called on the Lord to look kindly on the House of Israel.

A council of war in Holofernes' camp

5 Holofernes, general-in-chief of the Assyrian army, received the intelligence that the sons of Israel were preparing for war; that they had closed the mountain passes, fortified the high peaks and laid obstructions in the plains.

2 Holofernes was furious. He summoned all the princes of Moab, all the generals of Ammon and all the satraps of the coastal regions. "Men of Canaan," he said, "tell me: what people is this that occupies the highlands? What towns does it inhabit? How large is its army? What are the sources of its power and strength? Who is the king who rules it and commands its army? Why have these not condescended to wait on me, as all the western peoples have done?"

5 Achior,^a leader of all the Ammonites, replied, "May my lord please listen to what your servant is going to say. I will give you the facts about these mountain folk whose home lies close to you. You will hear no lie from the mouth of your servant. These people are descended from the Chaldaeans. They once came to live in Mesopotamia, because they did not want to follow the gods of their ancestors who lived in Chaldaea. They abandoned the way of their ancestors to worship the God of heaven, the God they had learned to acknowledge. Banished from the presence of their own gods, they fled to Mesopotamia where they lived for a long time. When God told them to leave their home and set out for Canaan, they settled there and accumulated gold and silver and great herds of cattle. Next, famine having overwhelmed the land of Canaan, they went down to Egypt where they stayed as long as food could be found there. There they became a great multitude, a race beyond counting. But the king of Egypt turned against them and exploited them by forcing them to make bricks; he degraded them, reducing them to slavery. They cried to their God, who struck the entire land of Egypt with incurable plagues, and the Egyptians expelled them. God dried up the Red Sea before them and led them forward by way of Sinai and Kadesh-barnea. Having driven off all the inhabitants of the desert, they settled in the land of the Amorites and, such was their strength, exterminated the inhabitants of Heshbon. Then, having crossed the Jordan, they took possession of all the highlands, driving out the Canaanites before them and the Perizzites, Jebusites, Shechemites and all the Gergashites, and lived there for many years. All the while they did not sin before their God, prosperity was theirs, for they have a God who hates wickedness. But when they turned from the path he had marked out for them, some were exterminated in a succession of battles, others taken captive to a foreign land. The Temple of their God was razed to the ground and their towns were seized by their enemies. Then having turned once again to their God, they came back from the places to which they had been dispersed and scattered, regained possession of Jerusalem, where they have their Temple, and reoccupied the highlands which had been left deserted. So now, master and lord, if this people has committed any fault, if they have sinned against their God, let us first make sure that they have offended in this way, and then let us advance and attack them. But if their nation is guiltless, my lord would do better to abstain, for fear that their Lord and God should protect them; we should then become the laughingstock of the whole world."

22 When Achior had ended this speech, all the people crowding around the tent
 began protesting. Holofernes' own senior officers, as well as all the coastal
 23 peoples and the Moabites, threatened to tear him limb from limb. "Why should
 27 we be afraid of the Israelites? They are a weak and powerless people, quite
 28 unable to stand a stiff attack. Forward! Advance! Your army, Holofernes our
 24 master, will swallow them in one mouthful!"

Achior handed over to the Israelites

1 **6** When the uproar of those crowding around the council had subsided,
 Holofernes, general-in-chief of the Assyrian army, reprimanded Achior in
 2 front of the whole crowd of foreigners and Ammonites. "Achior, who do you
 think you are, you and the Ammonite mercenaries, playing the prophet like
 this with us today, and trying to dissuade us from making war on the people
 of Israel? You claim their God will protect them. And who is their God if not
 Nebuchadnezzar? He himself will display his power and wipe them off the face
 3 of the earth, and their God will certainly not save them. But we, his servants,
 shall destroy them as easily as a single individual. They can never resist the
 4 strength of our cavalry. We shall burn them all. Their mountains will be drunk
 with their blood and their plains filled with their corpses. Far from being able
 to resist us, every one of them will die; thus says King Nebuchadnezzar, lord
 of the whole world. For he has spoken, and his words will not prove empty.
 5 As for you, Achior, you Ammonite mercenary, who in a rash moment said
 these words, you shall not see my face again until the day when I have taken
 6 my revenge on this brood of fugitives from Egypt. And then the swords of my
 4 soldiers and the spears of my officers will pierce your sides. You will fall
 7 among the wounded, the moment I turn on Israel. My servants will now take
 8 you into the highlands and leave you near one of the towns in the passes; you
 9 will not die, until you share their ruin. No need to look so sad if you cherish
 the secret hope that they will not be captured! I have spoken; none of my words
 will prove idle."

10 Holofernes having commanded his tent orderlies to seize Achior, to take him
 11 to Bethulia and to hand him over to the Israelites, the orderlies took him,
 8 escorted him out of the camp and across the plain, and then, making for the
 12 highlands, reached the springs below Bethulia. As soon as the men of the town
 sighted them, they snatched up their weapons, left the town and made
 for the mountain tops, while all the slingers pelted them with stones to prevent
 13 them from coming up. However, they managed to take cover at the foot of
 the slope, where they bound Achior and left him lying at the bottom of the
 mountain and returned to their master.

14 The Israelites then came down from their town, stopped by him, unbound
 10 him and took him to Bethulia, where they brought him before the chief men
 of the town, who at that time were Uzziah son of Micah of the tribe of Simeon,
 15 Chabris son of Gothoniel and Charmis son of Melchiel. These summoned all
 16 the elders of the town. The young men and the women also hurried to the
 assembly. Achior was made to stand with all the people surrounding him and
 17 Uzziah questioned him about what had happened. He answered by telling them
 12 what had been said at Holofernes' council, and what he himself had said in the
 presence of the Assyrian leaders, and how Holofernes had bragged of what he
 18 would do to the House of Israel. At this the people fell to the ground and
 14 worshiped God. "Lord God of heaven," they cried, "take notice of their
 15 arrogance and have pity on the humiliation of our race. Look kindly today on
 13 those who are consecrated to you." They then spoke reassuringly to Achior
 16 and praised him warmly. After the assembly Uzziah took him home and gave
 21 a banquet for the elders; all that night they called on the God of Israel for help.

II. BETHULIA UNDER SIEGE

The campaign against Israel

¹ **7** The following day Holofernes issued orders to his whole army and to the whole host of auxiliaries who had joined him to break camp and march on Bethulia, to occupy the mountain passes and so open the campaign against the Israelites. The troops broke camp that same day. The actual fighting force numbered one hundred and twenty thousand infantry and twelve thousand cavalry, not to mention the baggage train with the vast number of men on foot concerned with that. They penetrated the valley in the neighborhood of Bethulia, near the spring, and deployed on a wide front from Dothan to Balbaim and, in depth, from Bethulia to Cyamon, which faces on Esdraelon. When the Israelites saw this horde, they were all appalled and said to each other, "Now they will lick the whole country clean. Not even the loftiest peaks, the gorges or the hills will be able to stand the weight of them." Each man snatched up his arms; they lit beacons on their towers and spent the whole night on watch.

⁶ On the second day Holofernes deployed his entire cavalry in sight of the Israelites in Bethulia. He reconnoitered the slopes leading up to the town, located the water points, seized them and posted pickets over them and returned to the main body. The chiefs of the sons of Esau, the leaders of the Moabites^a and the generals of the coastal district then came to him and said, "If our master will please listen to us, his forces will not sustain a single wound. The Israelites do not rely so much on their spears as on the height of the mountains where they live. And admittedly it is not at all easy to scale these heights of theirs.

¹¹ "This being the case, master, do not engage them in a pitched battle, and then you will not lose a single man. Stay in camp, keep all your troops there too, while your servants seize the spring which rises at the foot of the mountain, since that is what provides the population of Bethulia with their water supply. Thirst will then force them to surrender their town. Meanwhile, we and our men will climb the nearest mountain tops and form advance posts there to prevent anyone from leaving the town. Hunger will waste them with their wives and children, and before the sword can reach them they will already be lying in the streets outside their houses. And you will make them pay dearly for their defiance and their refusal to meet you peaceably."

¹⁶ Their words pleased Holofernes as well as all his officers and he decided to do as they suggested. Accordingly a troop of Moabites moved forward with a further five thousand Assyrians. They penetrated the valley and seized the Israelites' water points and springs. Meanwhile the Edomites and Ammonites went and took up positions in the highlands opposite Dothan, sending some of their men to the southeast opposite Egrelbel, near Chous on the wadi Mochmur. The rest of the Assyrian army took up positions in the plain, covering every inch of the earth; their tents and equipment made an immense encampment, so vast were their numbers.

¹⁹ The Israelites called on the Lord their God, dispirited because the enemy had surrounded them and cut all line of retreat. For thirty-four days the Assyrian army, infantry, chariots, cavalrymen, had them surrounded. Every water jar the inhabitants of Bethulia had was empty, their wells were drying up; on no day could a man quench his thirst, since their water was rationed. Their little children pined away, the women and young men grew weak with thirst; they collapsed in the streets and gateways of the town; they had no strength left.

²³ Young men, women, children, the whole people thronged clamoring around Uzziah and the chief men of the town, shouting in the presence of the assembled elders, "May God be judge between you and us! For you have done us great harm, by not suing for peace with the Assyrians. And now there is no one to

help us. God has delivered us into their hands to be prostrated before them in thirst and utter helplessness. •Call them in at once; hand the whole town over to be sacked by Holofernes' men and all his army. •After all, we should be much better off as their booty than we are now; no doubt we shall be enslaved, but at least we shall be alive and not see our little ones dying before our eyes or our wives and children perishing. •By heaven and earth and by our God, the Lord of our fathers who is punishing us for our sins and the sins of our ancestors, we implore you to take this course now, today." •Bitter lamentations rose from the whole assembly, and they all cried loudly to the Lord God.

Then Uzziah spoke to them, "Take heart, brothers! Let us hold out five days more. By then the Lord our God will take pity on us, for he will not desert us altogether. •At the end of this time, if there is no help forthcoming, I will do as you have said." •With that he dismissed the people to their various quarters. The men went to man the walls and towers of the town, sending the women and children home. The town was full of despondency.

III. JUDITH

A portrait of Judith

1 **Q** Judith^a was informed at the time of what had happened. She was the daughter of Merari son of Ox, son of Joseph, son of Oziel, son of Eliah, son of Ananias, son of Gideon, son of Raphaim, son of Ahitub, son of Elijah, son of Hilkiyah, son of Eliab, son of Nathanael, son of Salamiel, son of Sarasadai, son of Israel. 2 Her husband Manasseh, of her own tribe and family, had died at the time of 3 barley harvest. •He was supervising the men as they bound up the sheaves in the field when he caught sunstroke and had to take to his bed. He died in Bethulia, his home town, and was buried with his ancestors in the field that lies between 4 Dothan and Balamon. •As a widow, Judith stayed inside her home for three 5 years and four months. •She had had an upper room built for herself on the 6 roof. She wore sackcloth around her waist and dressed in widow's weeds. •She fasted every day of her widowhood except for the sabbath eve, the sabbath itself, the eve of New Moon, the feast of New Moon and the festival days of the House 7 of Israel. •Now, she was very beautiful, charming to see. Her husband Manasseh had left her gold and silver, menservants and maidservants, cattle and lands; 8 and she lived among all her possessions •without anyone finding a word to say against her, so devoutly did she fear God.

Judith and the elders

9 Hearing how the water shortage had demoralized the people and how they had complained bitterly to the headman of the town, and being also told what Uzziah had said to them and how he had given them his oath to surrender the 10 town to the Assyrians in five days' time, •Judith immediately sent her woman of affairs who managed her property to summon Chabris and Charmis, two elders 11 of the town. •When these came in she said:

"Listen to me, leaders of the people of Bethulia. You were wrong to speak to the people as you did today and to bind yourself by oath, in defiance of God, to surrender the town to our enemies if the Lord did not come to your help within 12 a set number of days. •Who are you, to put God to the test today, you, out 13 of all mankind, to set yourselves above him? •You of all people to put the Lord 14 Almighty to the test! You do not understand anything, and never will. •If you cannot sound the depths of the heart of man or unravel the arguments of his mind, how can you fathom the God who made all things, or sound his mind

7 a. "The sons of Esau" are the Edomites; they and the Moabites are traditional enemies of Israel.

8 a. The name means "the Jewess."

or unravel his purposes? No, brothers, do not provoke the anger of the Lord
 15 our God. •Although it may not be his will to help us within the next five days, he
 has the power to protect us for as many days as he pleases, just as he has the
 16 power to destroy us before our enemies. •But you have no right to demand
 17 guarantees where the designs of the Lord our God are concerned. For God is
 not to be coerced as man is, nor is he, like mere man, to be cajoled. •Rather,
 as we wait patiently for him to save, let us plead with him to help us. He will
 hear our voice if such is his good pleasure.

18 “And indeed of recent times and still today there never has been one tribe
 of ours, or family, or village, or town that has worshiped gods made with human
 19 hands, as once was done, •and that was the reason why our ancestors were
 delivered over to sword and sack, and perished in misery at the hands of our
 20 enemies. We for our part acknowledge no other God than him; and so we may
 hope he will not look on us disdainfully or desert our nation.

21 “If indeed they capture us, as you expect, then all Judaea will be captured too,
 and our holy places plundered, and we shall answer with our blood for their
 22 profanation. •The slaughter of our brothers, the exile of our country, the
 unpeopling of our heritage, will recoil on our own heads among the nations
 whose slaves we will become, and our new masters will look down on us as an
 23 outrage and a disgrace; •for our surrender will not reinstate us in their favor;
 24 no, the Lord our God will make it a thing to be ashamed of. •So now, brothers,
 let us set an example to our brothers, since their lives depend on us and our
 most sacred possessions—Temple and altar—rest on us.

25 “All this being so, let us rather give thanks to the Lord our God who, as he
 26 tested our ancestors, is now testing us. •Remember how he treated Abraham, all
 27 the ordeals of Isaac, all that happened to Jacob in Syrian Mesopotamia while
 he kept the sheep of Laban, his mother’s brother. •For as these ordeals were
 intended by him to search their hearts, so now this is not vengeance God exacts
 against us, but a warning inflicted by the Lord on those who are near his heart.”

28 Uzziah replied, “Everything you have said has been spoken from sincerity
 29 of heart and no one will contradict a word of it. •Not that today is the first time
 your wisdom has been displayed; from your earliest years all the people have
 30 known how shrewd you are and of how sound a heart. •But, parched with
 thirst, the people forced us to act as we had promised them and to bind ourselves
 31 by an inviolable oath. •You are a devout woman; pray to the Lord, then, to
 32 send us a downpour to fill our cisterns, so that our faintness may pass.”

32 Judith replied, “Listen to me. I intend to do something, the memory of which
 33 will be handed down to the children of our race from age to age. •Tonight you
 must be at the gate of the town. I shall make my way out with my attendant.
 Before the time fixed by you for surrendering the town to our enemies, the Lord
 34 will make use of me to rescue Israel. •You must not ask what I intend to do;
 35 I will not tell you until I have done it.” •Uzziah and the chief man said, “Go in
 36 peace. May the Lord show you a way to take revenge on our enemies.” •And
 leaving the upper room they went back to their posts.

Judith’s prayer

1 **9** Judith threw herself face to the ground, scattered ashes on her head, uncovered
 the sackcloth she was wearing and cried loudly to the Lord. At the same time
 in Jerusalem the evening incense was being offered in the Temple of God.
 Judith said:

2 “Lord, God of my father Simeon,
 you armed him with a sword to take vengeance on the foreigners
 who had undone a virgin’s girdle to her shame,
 laid bare her thigh to her confusion,
 violated her womb to her dishonor,

since though you said, 'This must not be,' they did it.
 3 For this you handed their leaders over to slaughter,
 their bed, defiled by their deceit, to blood.
 You struck the slaves down with the chiefs
 and the chiefs with their servants.
 4 You left their wives to be carried off,
 3 their daughters to be taken captive,
 and their spoils to be shared out
 among the sons you loved,
 who had been so zealous for you,
 had loathed the stain put on their blood
 and called on you for help.

"God, my God,
 now hear this widow too;
 5 for you have made the past,
 4 and what is happening now, and what will follow.
 What is, what will be, you have planned;
 what has been, you designed.
 6 Your purposes stood forward;
 'See, we are here!' they said.
 5 For all of your ways are prepared
 and your judgments delivered with foreknowledge.

7 "See the Assyrians, boasting in their army,
 6 glorying in their horses and their riders,
 exulting in the strength of their infantry.
 9 Trust as they may in shield and spear,
 in bow and sling,
 10 in you they have not recognized
 the Lord, the shatterer of war;
 8 yours alone the title of Lord.

11 "Break their violence with your might,
 in your anger bring down their strength.
 For they plan to profane your holy places,
 to defile the tabernacle, the resting place of your glorious name,
 and to throw down with iron the horn of your altar.
 9 Observe their arrogance,
 12 send your fury on their heads,
 give the needful courage
 to this widow's hand.
 10 By guile of my lips
 strike slave down with master,
 and master with his servant.
 15 Break their pride
 by a woman's hand.

11 "Your strength does not lie in numbers,
 16 nor your might in violent men;
 since you are the God of the humble,
 the help of the oppressed,
 the support of the weak,
 the refuge of the forsaken,
 the savior of the despairing.

12 Please, please, God of my father,
 God of the heritage of Israel,

17 Master of heaven and earth,
 Creator of the waters,
 King of your whole creation,
 hear my prayer.
 13
 18 Give me a beguiling tongue
 to wound and kill
 those who have formed such cruel designs
 against your covenant,
 against your holy dwelling place,
 against Mount Zion,
 against the house belonging to your sons.
 14
 19 And demonstrate to every nation, every tribe,
 that you are Yahweh, God almighty, all powerful,
 and that the race of Israel
 has you for sole protector."

IV. JUDITH AND HOLOFERNES

Judith goes to the camp of Holofernes

1 **10** Thus Judith called on the God of Israel. When she had finished praying,
 2 she rose from where she lay, summoned her attendant and went down into
 3 the rooms which she used on sabbath days and feasts. There she removed the
 sackcloth she was wearing and, taking off her widow's dress, she washed all
 over, anointed herself with costly perfumes, dressed her hair, wrapped a turban
 around it and put on the dress she used to wear on joyful occasions when her
 4 husband Manasseh was alive. She put sandals on her feet, put on her necklaces,
 bracelets, rings, earrings and all her jewelry, and made herself beautiful enough
 5 to catch the eye of every man who saw her. Then she handed her attendant
 a skin of wine and a flask of oil, filled a bag with barley girdle cakes, cakes of
 dried fruit and pure loaves, and wrapping all these provisions up gave them
 6 to her as well. They then went out, making for the town gate of Bethulia. There
 they found Uzziah waiting with the two elders of the town, Chabris and Charmis.
 7 When they saw Judith, her face so changed and her clothes so different, they were
 lost in admiration of her beauty. They said to her:
 8 "May the God of our ancestors keep you in his favor!
 May he grant your purposes fulfillment
 to the glory of the sons of Israel,
 to the greater glory of Jerusalem!"

9 Judith worshiped God, and then she said, "Have the town gate opened for me
 so that I can go out and make all your wishes come true." They did as she asked
 10 and gave orders to the young men to open the gate for her. This done, Judith
 went out accompanied by her maid, while the men of the town watched her all
 the way down the mountain and across the valley, until they lost sight of her.
 11 As the women were making straight through the valley, an advance unit of
 12 Assyrians intercepted them, and seizing Judith began questioning her. "Which
 side are you on? Where do you come from? Where are you going?" "I am
 a daughter of the Hebrews," she replied, "and I am fleeing from them since they
 13 will soon be your prey. I am on my way to see Holofernes, the general of your
 army, to give him trustworthy information. I will show him the road to take
 if he wants to capture all the highlands without losing one man or one life."
 14 As the men listened to what she was saying, they stared in astonishment at the
 15 sight of such a beautiful woman. "It will prove the saving of you," they said
 to her, "coming down to see our master of your own accord. You had better
 16 go to his tent; some of our men will escort you and hand you over to him. Once

you are in his presence do not be afraid. Tell him what you have just told us and you will be well treated.” They then detailed a hundred of their men as escort for herself and her attendant, and these led them to the tent of Holofernes. News of her coming had already spread through the tents, and there was a general stir in the camp. She was still outside the tent of Holofernes waiting to be announced, when a crowd began forming around her. They were immensely impressed by her beauty and impressed with the Israelites because of her. “Who could despise a people having women like this?” they kept saying. “Better not leave one man of them alive; let any go and they would twist the whole world around their fingers!”

Then the bodyguard and adjutants of Holofernes came out and led Judith into the tent. Holofernes was resting on his bed under a canopy of purple and gold studded with emeralds and precious stones. The men announced her and he came out to the open part of the tent, with silver torches carried before him. When Judith confronted the general and his adjutant, the beauty of her face astonished them all. She fell on her face and did homage to him, but his servants raised her from the ground.

The first meeting of Judith with Holofernes

1 **11** “Courage, woman,” Holofernes said, “do not be afraid. I have never hurt anyone who chose to serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of the whole world. Even now, if your nation of mountain dwellers had not insulted me, I would not have raised a spear against them. This was their fault, not mine. But tell me, why have you fled from them and come to us? . . . Anyhow, this will prove the saving of you. Courage! You will live through this night, and many after. No one shall hurt you. No, you shall be treated as well as all those are who serve my lord King Nebuchadnezzar.”

2 Judith said, “Please listen favorably to what your slave has to say. Permit your servant to speak in your presence. I will speak no word of a lie in my lord’s presence tonight. You have only to follow your servant’s advice and God will bring your work to a successful conclusion; in what my lord undertakes he shall not fail. Long life to Nebuchadnezzar, king of the whole world, who has sent you to set every living soul to rights; may his power endure! Since, thanks to you, he is served not only by men, but through your compulsion the wild animals themselves, the cattle, and the birds of the air are to live in the service of Nebuchadnezzar and his whole House.

3 “We have indeed heard of your genius and adroitness of mind. It is known everywhere in the world that throughout the empire you have no rival for ability, wealth of experience and brilliance in waging war. We have also heard what Achior said in his speech to your council. The men of Bethulia having spared him, he has told them everything that he said to you. Now, master and lord, do not disregard what he said; keep it in your mind, since it is true; our nation will not be punished, the sword will indeed have no power over them, unless they sin against their God. But as it is, my lord need expect no repulse or setback, since death is about to fall on their heads, for sin has gained a hold over them, provoking the anger of their God each time that they commit it. As they are short of food and their water is giving out, they have resolved to fall back on their cattle and decided to make use of all the things that God has, by his laws, forbidden them to eat. Not only have they made up their minds to eat the first fruits of corn and the tithes of wine and oil, though these have been consecrated by them and set apart for the priests who serve in Jerusalem in the presence of our God and may not, lawfully, even be touched by the people, but they have even sent men to Jerusalem—where the inhabitants are doing much the same—to bring them back authorization from the Council of Elders. Now this will be the outcome: when the permission arrives and they act on it, that very day they shall be delivered over to you for destruction.

¹⁶ “When I, your servant, came to know all this, I fled from them. God has sent
¹³ me to do things with you at which the world will be astonished when it hears.
¹⁷ Your servant is a devout woman; she honors the God of heaven day and night.
¹⁴ I therefore propose, my lord, to stay with you. I, your servant, will go out
¹⁵ every night into the valley and pray to God to let me know when they have
¹⁸ committed their sin. I will then come and tell you, so that you can march out
¹⁹ with your whole army; and none of them will be able to resist you. I will
 be your guide right across Judaea until you reach Jerusalem; there I will enthrone
 you in the very middle of the city. Then you shall lead them like sheep and never
¹⁶ a dog dare open its mouth to bark at you. Foreknowledge tells me this; this
¹⁷ has been foretold to me and I have been set to reveal it to you.”

²⁰ Her words pleased Holofernes and all his adjutants. Full of admiration at
¹⁸ her wisdom they exclaimed, “There is no woman like her from one end of the
¹⁹ earth to the other, so lovely of face and so wise of speech!” Holofernes said,
²⁰ “God has done well to send you ahead of your people. Strength will be ours,
²¹ and ruin theirs who have insulted my lord. As for you, you are as beautiful as
 you are eloquent; if you do as you have promised, your god shall be my god,
 and you yourself shall make your home in the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar
 and be famous throughout the world.”

¹ **12** With that he had her brought in to where his silver dinner service was
 already laid, and had his own food served to her and his own wine poured
² out for her. But Judith said, “I would rather not eat this, in case I incur some
³ fault. What I have brought will be enough for me.” “Suppose your provisions
 run out,” Holofernes asked, “how could we get more of the same sort? We have
⁴ no one belonging to your race here.” “Never fear, my lord,” Judith answered,
 “the Lord will have used me to accomplish his plan, before your servant has
⁵ finished these provisions.” Then the adjutants of Holofernes took her to a tent
⁶ where she slept till midnight. A little before the morning watch she rose. She
 had already sent this request to Holofernes, “Let my lord kindly give orders
⁷ for your servant to be allowed to go out and pray,” and Holofernes had ordered
⁷ his guards not to prevent her. She stayed in the camp for three days; she went
 out each night to the valley of Bethulia and washed at the spring where the
⁸ picket had been posted. As she came up again she prayed to the Lord God of
⁹ Israel to guide her in her plan to relieve the children of her people. Having
 purified herself, she would return and stay in her tent until her meal was brought
 her in the evening.

Judith at the banquet of Holofernes

¹⁰ On the fourth day Holofernes gave a banquet, inviting only his own staff
¹¹ and none of the other officers. He said to Bagoas, the eunuch in charge of his
 personal affairs, “Go and persuade that Hebrew woman you are looking after
¹² to come and join us and eat and drink in our company. We shall be disgraced
¹¹ if we let a woman like this go without knowing her better. If we do not seduce
¹³ her, everyone will laugh at us!” Bagoas then left Holofernes and went to see
¹² Judith. “Would this young and lovely woman condescend to come to my lord?”
 he asked. “She shall occupy the seat of honor opposite him, drink the joyful
 wine with us and be treated today like one of the Assyrian ladies in waiting
¹⁴ in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar.” “Who am I,” Judith replied, “to resist my lord?”
¹³ I will not hesitate to do whatever he wishes, and doing this will be my joy to my
¹⁴ dying day.”

¹⁵ At this she rose and put on her dress and all her feminine adornments. Her
 maid preceded her, and on the floor in front of Holofernes spread the fleece
 which Bagoas had given Judith for her daily use to lie on as she ate.

¹⁶ Judith entered and took her place. The heart of Holofernes was ravished at
 the sight; his very soul was stirred. He was seized with a violent desire to sleep
 with her; and indeed since the first day he saw her, he had been waiting for an

17 opportunity to seduce her. "Drink, drink!" Holofernes said. "Enjoy yourself
18 with us!" "I am delighted to do so, Lord, for since my birth I have never felt
19 my life more worthwhile than today." She took what her maid had prepared,
20 and ate and drank facing him. Holofernes was so enchanted with her that he
drank far more wine than he had drunk on any other day in his life.

1 **13** It grew late and his staff hurried away. Bagoas closed the tent from the
outside, having shown out those who still lingered in his lord's presence.
2 They went to their beds wearied with all their drinking, and Judith was left
3,4 alone in the tent with Holofernes who had collapsed wine-sodden on his bed.
3 Judith then told her maid to stay just outside the bedroom and wait for her to
come out, as she did every morning. She had let it be understood she would be
going out to her prayers and had also spoken of her intention to Bagoas.

4 By now everyone had left Holofernes and no one, either important or unim-
6 portant, was left in the bedroom. Standing beside the bed, Judith murmured
to herself:

7 "Lord God, to whom all strength belongs,
prosper what my hands are now to do
for the greater glory of Jerusalem,
5 now is the time to recover your heritage
and further my designs
to crush the enemies arrayed against us."

6 With that she went up to the bedpost by Holofernes' head and took down his
7 scimitar; coming closer to the bed she caught him by the hair and said, "Make
8 me strong today, Lord God of Israel!" Twice she struck at the nape of his neck
9 with all her strength and cut off his head. She then rolled his body off the
11 bed and tore the canopy down from the bedposts. Soon after, she went out
10 and gave the head of Holofernes to her attendant who put it in her food bag.
12 The two then left the camp together, as they always did when they went to pray.
Once they were out of the camp, they skirted the ravine, climbed the slope to
Bethulia and made for the gates.

Judith brings the head of Holofernes to Bethulia

11 From a distance, Judith shouted to the guards on the gates, "Open the gate!
13 Open! For the Lord our God is with us still, displaying his strength in Israel
and his might against our enemies, as he has today!" Hearing her voice, the
12 townsmen hurried down to the town gate and summoned the elders. Everyone,
14 great and small, came running down, since her arrival was unexpected. They
15 threw the gate open, welcomed the women, lit a fire to see by and crowded
16 around them. Then Judith raised her voice and said, "Praise God! Praise him!
17,18 Praise the God who has not withdrawn his mercy from the House of Israel,
but has shattered our enemies by my hand tonight!" She pulled the head out
19 of the bag and held it for them to see. "This is the head of Holofernes, general-
in-chief of the Assyrian army; here is the canopy under which he lay drunk!
16 The Lord has struck him down by the hand of a woman! Glory to the Lord
20 who has protected me in the course I took! My face seduced him, only to his
own undoing; he committed no sin with me to shame me; or disgrace me."
17 Overcome with emotion, the people all fell on their knees and worshiped
22 God, exclaiming as one man, "Blessings on you, O our God, for confounding
18 your people's enemies today!" Uzziah then said to Judith:
23

"May you be blessed, my daughter, by God Most High,
beyond all women on earth;
24 and may the Lord God be blessed,
the Creator of heaven and earth,
by whose guidance you cut off the head

of the leader of our enemies.

19 The trust you have shown
25 shall not pass from the memories of men,
but shall ever remind them
of the power of God.
20 God grant you to be always held in honor,
and rewarded with blessings,
since you did not consider your own life
when our nation was brought to its knees,
but warded off our ruin,
walking undeterred before our God.”

26 All the people answered, “Amen! Amen!”

V. TRIUMPH

The Jews attack the Assyrian camp

1 **14** Judith said, “Listen to me, brothers. Take this head and hang it on your
2 battlements. When morning comes and the sun is up, let every man take
his arms and every able-bodied man leave the town. Appoint a leader for these,
as if you meant to march down to the plain against the Assyrian advance post.
3 But you must not do this. The Assyrians will gather up their equipment, make
4 for their camp and wake up their commanders; they in turn will rush to the
tent of Holofernes and not be able to find him. They will then be seized with
4 panic and flee at your advance. All you and the others who live in the territory
5 of Israel will have to do is to give chase and slaughter them as they retreat.
5 “But before you do this, call me Achior the Ammonite for him to see the
man who thought so meanly of the House of Israel and recognize this as the man
27,28 who sent him to us as a man already doomed to die.” (13)^a So they had Achior
brought from the house of Uzziah. No sooner had he arrived and seen the
head of Holofernes held by a member of the people’s assembly than he fell
7 down on his face in a faint. They lifted him up. He then threw himself at the
30 feet of Judith, and prostrate before her exclaimed:

31 “May you be blessed in all the tents of Judah
and in every nation;
at the sound of your name
men will be seized with dread.

8 “Now tell me exactly what you have been doing in these past few days.” And
surrounded by all the people Judith told him everything she had done from the
9 day she left Bethulia to the moment when she was speaking. When she came
to the end, the people cheered at the tops of their voices until the town echoed.
10 (14) Achior, recognizing the mighty works of the God of Israel, believed
6 ardently in him and, accepting circumcision, was incorporated in the House of
Israel forever.

11 At daybreak they hung the head of Holofernes on the ramparts. Every man
took his arms and they all went out in groups to the slopes of the mountain.
12 Seeing this, the Assyrians sent word to their leaders, who in turn reported to
13 the generals, the captains of thousands and all the other officers; and these
9,11 in their turn reported to the tent of Holofernes. “Rouse our master,” they said
12 to his major-domo, “these slaves have dared to march down on us to attack—
14 and to be wiped out to a man!” Bagoas went inside and clapped his hands in
13 front of the curtain dividing the tent, thinking that Holofernes was sleeping
15 with Judith. But as no one seemed to hear, he drew the curtain and went into
14 the bedroom, to find him thrown down dead on the threshold and the head

16 gone from his body. He gave a great shout, wept, sobbed, shrieked and rent
 17 his clothes. He then went into the tent which Judith had occupied and could
 18 not find her either. Then, rushing out to the men, he shouted, "Those slaves
 have duped us! One Hebrew woman has brought shame on the House of
 Nebuchadnezzar. Holofernes is lying dead on the ground, with his head cut off!"
 17 When they heard this, the leaders of the Assyrian army tore their tunics in
 18 consternation, and the camp rang with their wild cries and their shouting.

1 **15** When the men who were still in their tents heard the news they were
 2 appalled. They were so gripped with panic and dread that no two men
 3 could keep together: the rout was complete. They fled along every track across
 the plain or through the mountains. The men who had been bivouacking in
 the mountains around Bethulia were fleeing too. Then all the Israelite warriors
 4 charged down on them. Uzziah sent messengers to Betomasthaim, Bebai,
 Choba, Kola and through all the highlands of Israel, to inform them of what
 had happened and to urge them all to hurl themselves on the enemy and
 5 annihilate them. As soon as the Israelites heard the news, they fell on them as
 one man and massacred them all the way to Choba. The men of Jerusalem and
 the entire mountain country also rallied to them, once they had been informed
 of the events in the enemy camp. Then the men of Gilead and Galilee attacked
 them on the flank and struck at them fiercely till they neared Damascus and
 6 its territory. The rest, who had stayed in Bethulia, fell upon the Assyrian camp
 7 and looted it to their great profit. The Israelites returning from the slaughter
 8 seized what was left. The hamlets and villages of the mountain country and the
 plain also captured a great deal of booty, since there were vast stores of it.

Israel gives thanks

8 Joakim the high priest and the Council of Elders of Israel, who were in
 Jerusalem, came to gaze on the benefits that the Lord had lavished on Israel
 9 and to see Judith and congratulate her. On coming to her house they blessed
 10 her with one accord, saying:

"You are the glory of Jerusalem!
 You are the great pride of Israel!
 You are the highest honor of our race!

10 "By doing all this with your own hand
 11 you have deserved well of Israel,
 and God has approved what you have done.

"May you be blessed by the Lord Almighty
 in all the days to come!"

12 All the people answered, "Amen!"

13.14 The people looted the camp for thirty days. They gave Judith the tent of
 Holofernes, all his silver plate, his divans, his drinking bowls and all his furniture.
 She took this, loaded her mule, harnessed her carts and heaped the things into
 12 them. All the women of Israel, hurrying to see her, formed choirs of dancers
 13 in her honor. Judith distributed branches to the women who accompanied her;
 she and her companions put on wreaths of olive. Then she took her place at
 the head of the procession and led the women as they danced. All the men of
 14 Israel, armed and garlanded, followed them, singing hymns. With all Israel
 around her, Judith broke into this song of thanksgiving and the whole people
 sang this hymn aloud:

1 **16** "Praise my God with the tambourine,
 sing to the Lord with the cymbal,
 let psalm and canticle mingle for him,

extol his name, invoke it!

For the Lord is a God who shatters war;
he has pitched his camp in the middle of his people
to deliver me from the hands of my enemies.

“Assyria came down from the mountains of the north,
came with tens of thousands of his army.

Their multitude blocked the wadis,
their horses covered the hills.

He promised to burn up my country,
destroy my young men with the sword,
dash my sucklings to the ground,
make prey of my little ones,
carry off my maidens;

but the Lord Almighty has thwarted them
by a woman's hand.

For their hero did not fall at the young men's hands,
it was not sons of Titans who struck him down,
no proud giants made that attack,
but Judith, the daughter of Merari,
who disarmed him with the beauty of her face.

She laid aside her widow's dress
to rally those who were oppressed in Israel;
she anointed her face with perfume,
bound her hair under a turban,
put on a linen gown to seduce him.

Her sandal ravished his eye,
her beauty took his soul prisoner . . .
and the scimitar cut through his neck!

“The Persians trembled at her boldness,
the Medes were daunted by her daring.

These were struck with fear when my lowly ones shouted,
these were seized with terror when my weak ones shouted louder,
and when they shouted loudest, these gave ground.

The children of mere girls ran them through,
pierced them like the offspring of deserters.
They perished in the battle of my Lord!

“I will sing a new song to my God.
Lord, you are great, you are glorious,
wonderfully strong, unconquerable.

May your whole creation serve you!
For you spoke and things came into being,
you sent your breath and they were put together,
and no one can resist your voice.

“Should mountains topple
to mingle with the waves,
should rocks melt
like wax before your face,
to those who fear you,
you would still be merciful.

“A little thing indeed
is a sweetly smelling sacrifice,
still less the fat
burned for you in holocaust;

but whoever fears the Lord
is great for ever.

¹⁷₂₀ “Woe to the nations
who rise against my race!
The Lord Almighty
will punish them on judgment day.
²¹ He will send fire and worms in their flesh
and they shall weep with pain for evermore.”

¹⁸₂₂ When they reached Jerusalem they fell on their faces before God and, once
the people were purified, they offered their holocausts and voluntary offerings
¹⁹₂₃ and gifts. ·All Holofernes’ property given her by the people and the canopy she
herself had stripped from his bed, Judith vowed to God as a dedicated offering.
²⁰₂₄ For three months the people gave themselves up to rejoicings in Jerusalem before
the Temple, where Judith stayed with them.

Judith lives to old age. Her death

²¹₂₅ When this was over, everyone returned home. Judith went back to Bethulia
and lived on her estate; as long as she lived, she enjoyed a great reputation
²²₂₆ throughout the country. ·She had many suitors, but all her days, from the time
her husband Manasseh died and was gathered to his people, she never gave
²³ herself to another man. ·Her fame spread more and more the older she grew
²⁸ in her husband’s house; she lived to the age of a hundred and five years.^a She
emancipated her maid, then died in Bethulia and was buried in the cave where
²⁴₂₉ Manasseh her husband lay. ·The House of Israel mourned her for seven days.
Before her death she had distributed her property among her own relations
and those of her husband Manasseh.
²⁵₃₀ Never again during the lifetime of Judith, nor indeed for long after her death,
did anyone trouble the sons of Israel.

ESTHER

INTRODUCTORY

Mordecai's dream^a

11^{1a}₂ **1** *In the second year of the reign of the great King Ahasuerus,^b on the first day of Nisan, a dream came to Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Jew living at Susa and holding high office at the royal court. He was one of the captives whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had deported from Jerusalem with Jeconiah, king of Judah.^c*

1^{1d}₅ *This was his dream. There were cries and noise, thunder and earthquakes, and disorder over the whole earth. Then two great dragons came forward, each ready for the fray, and set up a great roar. At the sound of them every nation made ready to wage war against the nation of the just. A day of darkness and gloom, of affliction and distress, oppression and great disturbance on earth! The righteous nation was thrown into consternation at the fear of the evils awaiting them, and prepared for death, crying out to God. Then from their cry, as from a little spring, there grew a great river, a flood of water. Light came as the sun rose, and the humble were raised up and devoured the mighty.*

1^{1f}₇ *On awakening from this dream and vision of God's designs, Mordecai thought deeply on the matter, trying his best all day to discover what its meaning might be.*

A plot against the king

1^{1m}_{12:7} *Lodging at court with Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the palace, Mordecai got wind of their intentions and uncovered their plot. Learning that they were preparing to assassinate King Ahasuerus, he warned the king against them. The king gave orders for the two eunuchs to be tortured; they confessed and were executed. The king then had these events recorded in his Chronicles, while Mordecai himself also wrote an account of them. The king then appointed Mordecai to an office at court and rewarded him with presents. But Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, who enjoyed high favor with the king, determined to injure Mordecai in revenge for the king's two eunuchs.*

I. AHASUERUS AND VASHTI

Ahasuerus' banquet

1 **1** *It was in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus whose empire stretched from India to Ethiopia and comprised one hundred and twenty-seven provinces.*
2 *In those days, when King Ahasuerus was sitting on his royal throne in the*
3 *citadel of Susa, in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet at his court for all his administrators and ministers, chiefs of the army of Persia and Media,*
4 *nobles and governors of provinces. Thus he displayed the riches and splendor of his empire and the pomp and glory of his majesty; the festivities went on for a long time, a hundred and eighty days.*

5 When this period was over, for seven days the king gave a banquet for all the people living in the citadel of Susa, to high and low alike, in the enclosure
6 adjoining the king's palace. There were white and violet hangings fastened with
7 cords of fine linen and purple thread to silver rings on marble columns, couches
8 of gold and silver on a pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and
9 precious stones. For drinking there were golden cups of various design and
10 the royal wine in plenty according to the king's bounty. By royal command,
11 however, drinking was not obligatory, the king having instructed the officials
12 of his household to treat each guest according to his own wishes.

The affair of Vashti

9 Queen Vashti,^d too, had given a banquet for the women in the royal palace
10 of King Ahasuerus. On the seventh day, when the king was merry with wine,
11 he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and
12 Carkas, the seven eunuchs in attendance on the person of King Ahasuerus,
13 to bring Queen Vashti before the king crowned with her royal diadem, in order
14 to display her beauty to the people and the administrators, for she was very
15 beautiful. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered
16 by the eunuchs. The king was very angry at this and his rage grew hot. He then
17 consulted the wise men who were versed in the law, since it was the practice
18 to refer matters affecting the king to expert lawyers and jurists. He summoned
19 Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the
20 seven administrators of Persia and Media who had privileged access to the royal
21 presence and occupied the leading positions in the kingdom. "According to
22 law," he said, "what is to be done to Queen Vashti for not obeying the command
of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?" In the presence of the king and of
the administrators Memucan answered, "Vashti has wronged not only the king,
but also all the administrators and nations inhabiting the provinces of King
Ahasuerus. The queen's conduct will soon become known to all the women
and encourage them in a contemptuous attitude toward their husbands, since
they will say, 'King Ahasuerus ordered Queen Vashti to appear before him and
she did not come.' The wives of all the Persian and Median administrators
will hear of the queen's answer before the day is out, and will start talking to
the king's administrators in the same way; that will mean contempt and anger
all around. If it is the king's pleasure, let him issue a royal edict, to be irrevocably
incorporated into the laws of the Persians and Medes, to the effect that Vashti
is never to appear again before King Ahasuerus, and let the king confer her royal
dignity on a worthier woman. Let this edict issued by the king be proclaimed
throughout the length and breadth of his realm, and all the women will henceforth
bow to the authority of their husbands, both high and low alike."

21 This speech pleased the king and the administrators and the king did as
22 Memucan advised. He sent letters to all the provinces of the kingdom, to each
province in its own script and to each nation in its own language, ensuring that
every husband should be master in his own house.

II. MORDECAI AND ESTHER

Esther becomes queen

1 **2** Some time after this, when the king's wrath had abated, Ahasuerus remem-
bered Vashti, how she had behaved, and the measures taken against her.

1 a. Passages found in the Greek text but not contained in the Hebrew are printed in italic. In places where the verse numbering differs from the Vulgate Latin text, the Vulgate verse numbers are added in italic. b. 'Ahasuerus' is the Hebrew transliteration of the Persian name which in Greek is rendered Xerxes. c. The chronological details cannot be harmonized; Mordecai is a courtier of Ahasuerus (about 480) and was exiled in the reign of Jeconiah (about 598). d. She is unknown to history.

² The king's courtiers in waiting said, "Let beautiful girls be selected for the king.
³ Let the king appoint commissioners throughout the provinces of his realm to bring all these beautiful young virgins to the citadel of Susa, to the harem under the authority of Hegai the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. Let him
⁴ provide them with what they need for their adornment, and let the girl who pleases the king take Vashti's place as queen." This advice pleased the king and he acted on it.

⁵ Now in the citadel of Susa there lived a Jew called Mordecai son of Jair, son
⁶ of Shimei, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who had been deported from Jerusalem among the captives taken away with Jeconiah king of Judah by
⁷ Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. He had brought up Hadassah, otherwise called Esther,⁴ his uncle's daughter, who had lost both father and mother; the girl had a good figure and a beautiful face, and on the death of her parents Mordecai had adopted her as his daughter.

⁸ Following the promulgation of the king's edict, a great number of girls were brought to the citadel of Susa where they were entrusted to Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, the custodian of the
⁹ women. The girl pleased him and won his favor. Not only did he quickly provide her with all she needed for her dressing room and her meals, but he gave her seven special maids from the king's household and transferred her and
¹⁰ her maids to the best part of the harem. Esther did not reveal her race or
¹¹ kindred, since Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. Mordecai walked up and down in front of the courtyard of the harem every day, to learn how Esther was and how she was being treated.

¹² Each girl had to appear in turn before King Ahasuerus, after a delay of twelve months fixed by the regulations for the women; this preparatory period was occupied as follows: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with
¹³ spices and lotions commonly used for feminine beauty treatment. Before going into the king, each girl was allowed to take with her from the harem to the king's
¹⁴ palace whatever she chose. She went there in the evening, and the following morning returned to another harem entrusted to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, custodian of the concubines. She did not go to the king any more, unless he was particularly pleased with her and had her summoned by name.

¹⁵ But when it was the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail whose nephew Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter, to go into the king's presence, she did not ask for anything beyond what had been assigned her by Hegai, the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. And Esther soon won the admiration of
¹⁶ all who saw her. She was brought to King Ahasuerus in his royal palace in the tenth month, which is called Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign; and the
¹⁷ king liked Esther better than any of the other women; none of the other girls found so much favor and approval with him. So he set the royal diadem on her head and proclaimed her queen instead of Vashti.

¹⁸ Then the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his administrators and ministers, decreed a holiday for all the provinces and distributed largesse with royal prodigality.

Mordecai and Haman

¹⁹ When Esther, like the other girls, had been transferred to the second harem, she had not revealed her kindred or race, in obedience to the orders of Mordecai, whose instructions she continued to follow as when she had been under his care.
²¹ At this time Mordecai was attached to the Chancellery and two malcontents, Bigthan and Teresh, king's eunuchs belonging to the Guardians of the Threshold, plotted to assassinate King Ahasuerus. Mordecai came to hear of this and informed Queen Esther, who in turn, on Mordecai's authority, told the king.
²³ The matter was investigated and proved to be true. The two conspirators were sent to the gallows, and the incident was recorded in the Book of the Chronicles in the presence of the king.

1 **3** Shortly afterward, King Ahasuerus singled out Haman son of Hammedatha, from the land of Agag,² for promotion. He raised him in rank and precedence above all his colleagues, the other officers of state, and gave orders that all the officials employed at the Chancellery were to bow down and prostrate themselves before Haman. Mordecai refused either to bow or prostrate himself. "Why do you flout the royal command?" the officials of the Chancellery asked Mordecai. They asked him this day after day, but he took no notice of them. In the end they reported the matter to Haman, wishing to see whether Mordecai would persist in his attitude, since he had told them he was a Jew. When Haman had seen for himself that Mordecai did not bow or prostrate himself before him, he was seized with fury. Having been told what race Mordecai belonged to, he could not be content with murdering Mordecai but made up his mind to wipe out all the members of Mordecai's race, the Jews, throughout the empire of Ahasuerus.

III. THE JEWS IN PERIL

The decree of extermination against the Jews

7 In the first month, that is the month of Nisan, of the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast the pur (that is, the lot) before Haman for the day and 8 the month. The lot falling on the twelfth month, which is Adar, Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain unassimilated nation scattered among the other nations throughout the provinces of your realm; their laws are different from those of all the other nations and they ignore the royal edicts; hence it 9 is not in the king's interests to tolerate them. If it please the king to decree their destruction, I am prepared to pay ten thousand talents of silver to the king's receivers, to be credited to the royal treasury."

10 The king then took his signet ring off his hand and gave it to Haman son of 11 Hammedatha, the Agagite, the persecutor of the Jews. "Keep the money," he said, "and you can have the people too; do what you like with them."

12 Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the royal scribes were summoned, and copies were made of the orders addressed by Haman to the king's satraps, to the governors ruling each province and to the principal officials of each people, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language. The edict was signed in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with his ring, 13 and letters were sent by runners to every province of the realm ordering the destruction, slaughter and annihilation of all Jews, young and old, women and children, on the one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is Adar, and the seizing of their possessions.

13a *The text of the letter was as follows:*

13:1 *"The great King, Ahasuerus, to the governors of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia, and to their subordinate district commissioners.*

13b *"Being placed in authority over many nations and ruling the whole world, I have resolved never to be carried away by the insolence of power, but always to rule with moderation and clemency, so as to assure for my subjects a life ever free from storms and, offering my kingdom the benefits of civilization and free transit from 13c end to end, to restore that peace which all men desire. In consultation with our advisers as to how this aim is to be effected, we have been informed by one of them, eminent among us for prudence and well proved for his unflinching devotion and unshakeable trustworthiness, and in rank second only to our majesty, Haman by*

2 a. Probably a Babylonian name (Ishtar), like Mordecai (Marduk).

3 a. Country not known; the name is that of an Amalekite king conquered by Saul.

^{13d}₄ name, *that there is, mingled among all the tribes of the earth a certain ill-disposed people, opposed by its laws to every other nation and continually defying the royal ordinances, in such a way as to obstruct that form of government assured by us to the general good.*

^{13e}₅ *"Considering therefore that this people, unique of its kind, is in complete opposition to all mankind from which it differs by its outlandish system of laws, that it is hostile to our interests and that it commits the most heinous crimes, to the point of endangering the stability of the realm:*

^{13f}₆ *"We command that the people designated to you in the letters written by Haman, appointed to watch over our interests and a second father to us, are all, including women and children, to be destroyed root and branch by swords of their enemies, without any pity or mercy, on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar, of*
^{13g}₇ *the present year, so that, these past and present malcontents being in one day forcibly thrown down to Hades, our government may henceforward enjoy perpetual stability and peace."*

¹⁴ The text of this decree, to be promulgated as law in each province, was published to the various peoples, so that each might be ready for the day aforementioned. ¹⁵ At the king's command, the runners set out with all speed; the decree was first promulgated in the citadel of Susa.

While the king and Haman gave themselves up to feasting and drinking, consternation reigned in the city of Susa.

Mordecai and Esther try to avert the danger

¹ **4** When Mordecai learned what had happened, he tore his garments and put on sackcloth and ashes. Then he went right through the city, wailing loud and ² bitterly, until he arrived in front of the Chancellery, which no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter. ³ And in every province, no sooner had the royal edict been read than among the Jews there was great mourning, fasting, weeping and wailing, and many lay on sackcloth and ashes.

⁴ When Queen Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, she was overcome with grief. She sent clothes for Mordecai to put on instead of his sackcloth, ⁵ but he refused them. Then Esther summoned Hathach, a eunuch whom the king had appointed to wait on her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai and inquire what was the matter and why he was acting in this way.

⁶ Hathach went out to Mordecai, who was still in the city square in front of ⁷ the Chancellery, and Mordecai told him what had happened to him personally, and also about the sum of money which Haman had offered to pay into the ⁸ royal treasury as compensation for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the edict of extermination published in Susa for him to show ^{15:1} Esther for her information, with the message that she was to go to the king and ^{8a}₂ implore his favor and plead with him for her people. *"Remember your humbler circumstances," he said, "when you were fed by my hand. Since Haman, the second ^{8b}₃ person in the realm, has petitioned the king for our deaths, invoke the Lord, speak to the king for us and save us from death!"*

⁹ Hathach came back and told Esther what Mordecai had said; and she ¹⁰ replied with the following message for Mordecai, *"All the king's servants and the people of his provinces know that for a man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned there is one penalty: death, unless, by pointing his golden scepter toward him, the king grants him his life. And I have not been summoned to the king for the last thirty days."*

¹²₁₃ These words of Esther were reported to Mordecai, who sent back the following reply, *"Do not suppose that, because you are in the king's palace, you ¹⁴ are going to be the one Jew to escape. No; if you persist in remaining silent at such a time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place,^a but both you and the House of your father will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to the throne for just such a time as this."*

¹⁵ Whereupon Esther sent this reply to Mordecai, “Go and assemble all the
¹⁶ Jews now in Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink day or night for three
 days. For my part, I and my maids will keep the same fast, after which I shall
¹⁷ go to the king in spite of the law; and if I perish, I perish.” Mordecai went
 away and carried out Esther’s instructions.

Mordecai’s prayer

^{17a} ^{13:8} Then calling to mind all the wonderful works of the Lord, he offered this prayer:

^{17b} ⁹ “Lord, Lord, King and Master of all things,
 everything is subject to your power,
 and there is no one who can withstand you
 in your will to save Israel.

^{17c} ¹⁰ “Yes, you have made heaven and earth,
 and all the marvels that are under heaven.
¹¹ You are the Lord of all,
 and there is none who can resist you, Lord.

^{17d} ¹² “You know all things;
 you know, Lord, you know,
 that no insolence, arrogance, vainglory
 prompted me to this,
 to this refusal to bow down
 before proud Haman.
¹³ I would readily have kissed his feet
 for the safety of Israel.

^{17e} ¹⁴ “But what I did, I did
 rather than place the glory of a man
 above the glory of God;
 and I will not bow down to any
 but to you, Lord;
 in so refusing I will not act in pride.

^{17f} ¹⁵ “And now, Lord God,
 King, God of Abraham,
 spare your people!
 For men are seeking our ruin
 and plan to destroy your ancient heritage.
^{17g} ¹⁶ Do not overlook your inheritance,
 which you redeemed for your own out of the land of Egypt.
^{17h} ¹⁷ Hear my supplication,
 have mercy on your heritage,
 and turn our grief into rejoicing,
 that we may live to hymn your name, Lord.
 Do not suffer the mouths
 of those who praise you to perish.”

¹⁷ⁱ ¹⁸ And all Israel cried out with all their might, for they were faced with death.

Esther’s prayer

^{14:1} ^{17k} ² Queen Esther also took refuge with the Lord in the mortal peril which had
 overtaken her. She took off her sumptuous robes and put on sorrowful mourning.
 Instead of expensive perfumes she covered her head with ashes and dung. She
 humbled her body severely, and the former scenes of her happiness and elegance

³ were now littered with tresses torn from her hair. She besought the Lord God of Israel in these words:

- 17l *"My Lord, our King, the only one,
come to my help, for I am alone
and have no helper but you
and am about to take my life in my hands.*
- 4
- 17m₅ *"I have been taught from my earliest years, in the bosom of my family,
that you, Lord, chose
Israel out of all the nations
and our ancestors out of all the people of old times
to be your heritage for ever;
and that you have treated them as you promised.*
- 17n₆ *"But then we sinned against you,
and you handed us over to our enemies
for paying honor to their gods.
Lord, you are just.*
- 7
- 17o₈ *"But even now they are not satisfied
with the bitterness of our slavery:
they have put their hands in the hands of their idols^b
to abolish the decree that your own lips have uttered,
to blot out your heritage,
to stop the mouths of those who praise you,
to quench your altar and the glory of your House,
and instead to open the mouths of the heathen,
to sing the praise of worthless idols
and forever to idolize a king of flesh.*
- 9
- 17p₁₀ *"Do not yield your scepter, Lord,
to non-existent beings.
Never let men mock at our ruin.
Turn their designs against themselves,
and make an example of him who leads the attack on us.
Remember, Lord; reveal yourself
in the time of our distress.*
- 17q₁₁
- 17r₁₂ *"As for me, give me courage,
King of gods and master of all power.
Put persuasive words into my mouth
when I face the lion;
change his feeling into hatred for our enemy,
that the latter and all like him may be brought to their end.*
- 17s₁₃
- 17t₁₄ *"As for ourselves, save us by your hand,
and come to my help, for I am alone
and have no one but you, Lord.
You have knowledge of all things,
and you know that I hate honors from the godless,
that I loathe the bed of the uncircumcised,
of any foreigner whatever.
You know I am under constraint,
that I loathe the symbol of my high position
bound round my brow when I appear at court;
I loathe it as if it were a filthy rag
and do not wear it on my days of leisure.
Your handmaid has not eaten at Haman's table,*
- 17u₁₅
- 17w₁₆
- 17x₁₇

*nor taken pleasure in the royal banquets,
nor drunk the wine of libations.*

17
18

*Nor has your handmaid found pleasure
from the day of her promotion until now
except in you, Lord, God of Abraham.*

17
19

*O God, whose strength prevails over all,
listen to the voice of the desperate,
save us from the hand of the wicked,
and free me from my fear."*

Esther presents herself at the palace

^{1a}_{15:4} **5** On the third day, when she had finished praying, she took off her suppliant's mourning attire and dressed herself in her full splendor. Radiant as she then appeared, she invoked God who watches over all men and saves them. Then ⁶ she took two maids with her. With a delicate air she leaned on one, while the other accompanied her carrying her train. She leaned on the maid's arm as though ⁷ languidly, but in fact because her body was too weak to support her; the other ^{1b}₈ maid followed her mistress, lifting her robes which swept the ground. •Rosy with the full flush of her beauty, her face radiated joy and love: but her heart shrank ^{1c}₉ with fear. •Having passed through door after door, she found herself in the presence of the king. He was seated on the royal throne, dressed in all his robes ^{1d}₁₀ of state, glittering with gold and precious stones—a formidable sight. •Raising his face, afire with majesty, he looked on her, blazing with anger. The queen sank down. She grew faint and the color drained from her face, and she leaned her ^{1e}₁₁ head against the maid who accompanied her. •But God changed the king's heart inducing a milder spirit. He sprang from his throne in alarm and took her in his ^{1f}₁₂ arms until she recovered, comforting her with soothing words. •"What is the matter, ^{1g}₁₃ Esther?" he said. "I am your brother. Take heart; you will not die; our order only ^{1h}_{14,15} applies to ordinary people. Come to me." •And raising his golden scepter he laid ¹ⁱ₁₆ it on her neck, embraced her and said, "Speak to me." •"My lord," she said, "you ^{1j}₁₇ looked to me like an angel of God, and my heart was moved with fear of your ^{1k}₁₈ majesty. For you are a figure of wonder, my lord, and your face is full of ^{1l}₁₉ graciousness." •But as she spoke she fell down in a faint. The king was distressed, and all his attendants tried their best to revive her. •"What is the matter, Queen ^{1m}₂₀ Esther?" the king said. "Tell me what you desire; even if it is half my kingdom, ¹ⁿ₂₁ I grant it you." •"Would the king be pleased," Esther replied, "to come with Haman ^{1o}₂₂ today to the banquet I have prepared for him?" •The king said, "Tell Haman to come at once, so that Esther may have her wish."

^{1p}₂₃ So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared. •As they drank their wine, the king again said to Esther, "Tell me what you request; I grant it to you. Tell me what you desire; even if it is half my kingdom, it is yours ^{1q}₂₄ for the asking." •"What do I desire, what do I request?" Esther replied. "If I have found favor in the king's eyes, and if it is his pleasure to grant what I ask and to agree to my request, let the king and Haman come to the other banquet I intend to give them tomorrow, and then I will do as the king says."

^{1r}₂₅ Haman left full of joy and high spirits that day; but when he saw Mordecai at the Chancellery, neither standing up nor stirring at his approach, he felt ^{1s}₂₆ a gust of anger. •He restrained himself, however. Returning home, he sent for ^{1t}₂₇ his friends and Zeresh his wife and held forth to them about his dazzling wealth, his many children, how the king had raised him to a position of honor and ^{1u}₂₈ promoted him over the heads of the king's administrators and ministers. •"What is more," he added, "Queen Esther just invited me and the king—no one else ^{1v}₂₉ except me—to a banquet she was giving, and better still she has invited me and ^{1w}₃₀ the king again tomorrow. •But what do I care about all this when all the while ^{1x}₃₁ I see Mordecai the Jew sitting there at the Chancellery?" •"Have a fifty-cubit

gallows run up," Zeresh his wife and all his friends said, "and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then accompany the king to the feast without a care in the world!" Delighted with this advice, Haman had the gallows erected.

IV. THE JEWS' REVENGE

The discomfiture of Haman

6 That night, the king could not sleep; he called for the Record Book, the
2 Chronicles, to be brought and read to him. They contained an account of
 how Mordecai had denounced Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs
 serving as Guardians of the Threshold, who had plotted to assassinate king
3 Ahasuerus. "And what honor and dignity," the king asked, "was conferred on
 Mordecai for this?" "Nothing has been done for him," the courtiers in attendance
4 replied. Then the king said, "Who is on duty in the antechamber?" Haman had
 at that moment entered the outer antechamber of the king's palace to ask the
 king to have Mordecai hanged on the gallows which he had just put up for the
5 purpose. So the king's courtiers replied, "Haman is waiting in the antechamber."
6 "Bring him in," the king said, and went on to ask as soon as Haman had entered,
 "What is the right way to treat a man whom the king wishes to honor?" "Whom,"
7 thought Haman, "would the king wish to honor, if not me?" So he replied, "If
8 the king wishes to honor someone, have royal robes brought, which the
 king has worn, and a horse which the king has ridden, with a royal diadem on
 its head. The robes and horse should be handed to one of the noblest of the
 king's officers, and he should array the man whom the king wishes to honor
 and lead him on horseback through the city square, proclaiming before him:
10 "This is the way to treat a man whom the king wishes to honor." "Hurry," the
 king said to Haman, "take the robes and the horse, and do everything you have
 just said to Mordecai the Jew, who works at the Chancellery. On no account
 leave anything out that you have mentioned."

11 So taking the robes and the horse, Haman arrayed Mordecai and led him on
 horseback through the city square, proclaiming before him: "This is the way to
12 treat a man whom the king wishes to honor." After this Mordecai returned
 to the Chancellery, while Haman went hurrying home dejected, covering his
13 face. He told his wife Zeresh and all his friends what had just happened. His
 wife Zeresh and his friends said, "Thanks to Mordecai, you have just had a fall;
 if he happens to belong to the Jewish race, you will never recover the upper
 hand again. Far from it; once having begun, thanks to him you will fall and
 fall again."

Haman at Esther's banquet

14 While they were still talking, the king's eunuchs arrived in a hurry to escort
1 Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared. **7** When the king and Haman
2 were seated at the banquet with Queen Esther this second day, the king again
 said to Esther as they drank their wine, "Tell me what you request, Queen Esther?
 I grant it to you. Tell me what you desire: even if it is half my kingdom, it is yours
3 for the asking." "If I have found favor in your eyes, O king," Queen Esther
 replied, "and if it please your majesty, grant me my life—that is what I request;
4 and the lives of my people—that is what I desire. For we are doomed, I and
 my people, to destruction, slaughter and annihilation; if we had merely been
 condemned to become slaves and servant girls, I would have said nothing; but
 as things are, it will be beyond the means of the persecutor to make good the
5 loss that the king is about to sustain." King Ahasuerus interrupted Queen
 Esther, "Who is this man?" he exclaimed. "Where is he, the schemer of such an
6 outrage?" Esther replied, "The persecutor, the enemy? Why, this wretch Haman!"
7 Haman quaked with terror in the presence of the king and queen. In a rage

the king rose and left the banquet to go into the palace garden; while Haman, realizing that the king was determined on his ruin, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

- 8 When the king returned from the palace garden into the banqueting hall, he found Haman huddled across the couch where Esther was reclining. "What!" the king exclaimed. "Is he going to rape the queen before my eyes in my own palace?" The words were scarcely out of his mouth than a veil was thrown over
 9 Haman's face. Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, was present. He said, "How convenient! There is that fifty-cubit gallows which Haman ran up for Mordecai, whose report saved the king's life. It is all ready at his house."
 10 "Hang him on it," said the king. So Haman was hanged on the gallows which he had erected for Mordecai, and the king's wrath subsided.

The royal favor passes to the Jews

- 1 **8** That same day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the persecutor of the Jews. Mordecai was presented to the king, Esther having
 2 revealed their mutual relationship. The king, who had recovered his signet ring from Haman, took it off and gave it to Mordecai, while Esther gave Mordecai charge of Haman's house.
 3 Esther again went to speak to the king. She fell at his feet, weeping and imploring his favor, to frustrate the wicked scheme devised by Haman the
 4 Agagite and his plot against the Jews. The king held out the golden scepter
 5 to her, whereupon Esther rose and stood face to face with him. "If such is the king's good pleasure," she said, "and if I have found favor before him, if my petition seems proper to him and if I myself am pleasing to his eyes, may he be pleased to issue a written revocation of the letters which Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, contrived to have written to procure the destruction of the
 6 Jews in every province of the realm. For how can I look on, while my people suffer what is in store for them? How can I bear to witness the extermination of my race?"
 7 King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "I for my part have given Esther Haman's house, and have had him hanged on the gallows
 8 for planning to destroy the Jews. You are free now to write to them as you judge best, in the king's name, and seal what you write with the king's signet; for an order written in the king's name and sealed with his signet is irrevocable."
 9 The royal scribes were summoned at once—it was the third month, the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day—and at Mordecai's dictation an order was written to the Jews, the satraps, governors and administrators of the provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia, a hundred and twenty-seven provinces, to each province in its own script, and to each people in its own language, and to
 10 the Jews in their own script and language. These letters, written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet, were carried by couriers
 11 mounted on horses from the king's own stud farms. In them the king granted the Jews, in whatever city they lived, the right to assemble in self-defense, with permission to destroy, slaughter and annihilate any armed force of any people
 12 and to plunder their possessions, with effect from the same day throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus—the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is Adar.

The decree of rehabilitation

- 12^a *The text of the letter was as follows:*
 16^a 12^b "The great King, Ahasuerus, to the satraps of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces which stretch from India to Ethiopia, to the provincial governors and to all our loyal subjects, greeting.
 12^c "Many men, repeatedly honored by the extreme bounty of their benefactors,

³ only grow the more arrogant. It is not enough for them to seek our subjects' injury, but unable as they are to support the weight of their own surfeit they turn
^{12d}₄ to scheming against their benefactors themselves. •Not content with banishing gratitude from the human heart, but elated by the plaudits of men unacquainted with goodness, notwithstanding that all is for ever under the eye of God, they
^{12e}₅ vainly expect to escape his justice, so hostile to the wicked. •Thus it has often happened to those placed in authority that, having entrusted friends with the conduct of affairs and allowed themselves to be influenced by them, they find themselves sharing with these the guilt of innocent blood and involved in irremediable mis-
^{12f}₆ fortunes, •the upright intentions of rulers having been misled by false arguments of
^{12g}₇ the evilly disposed. •This may be seen without recourse to the history of earlier times to which we have referred; you have only to look at what is before you, at all crimes
^{12h}₈ perpetrated by a plague of unworthy officials. •For the future we will exert our
¹²ⁱ₉ efforts to assure the tranquillity and peace of the realm for all, •by adopting new policies and by always judging matters that are brought to our notice in the most equitable spirit.

^{12k}₁₀ "Thus Haman son of Hammedatha, a Macedonian, without a drop of Persian
^{12l}₁₁ blood and far removed from our goodness, enjoyed our hospitality •and was treated by us with the benevolence which we show to every nation, even to the extent of being proclaimed our 'father' and being accorded universally the prostration of respect as second in dignity to the royal throne. •But he, unable to keep within his
^{12m}₁₂ own high rank, schemed to deprive us of our realm and of our life. •Furthermore, by
¹²ⁿ₁₃ tortuous wiles and arguments, he would have had us destroy Mordecai, our savior and constant benefactor, with Esther the blameless partner of our majesty, and their whole nation besides. •He thought by these means to leave us without support and so to transfer the Persian empire to the Macedonians.

^{12p}₁₅ "But we find that the Jews, marked out for annihilation by this archscoundrel,
^{12q}₁₆ are not criminals; they are in fact governed by the most just of laws. •They are sons of the Most High, the great and living God to whom we and our ancestors owe the continuing prosperity of our realm. •You will therefore do well not to act on the letters sent by Haman son of Hammedatha, since their author has been hanged at the gates of Susa with his whole household: a well-earned punishment which
^{12r}₁₇₁₈ God, the ruler of all things, has speedily inflicted on him. •Put up copies of this letter
^{12s}₁₉₂₀ everywhere, allow the Jews freedom to observe their own customs, and come to their help against anyone who attacks them on the day originally chosen for their maltreatment, that is the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is Adar. •For the all-powerful God has made this day a day of joy and not of ruin for his chosen
^{12t}₂₁ people. •Jews, for your part, among your solemn festivals celebrate this as a special day with every kind of feasting, so that now and in the future, for you and for
^{12u}₂₂ Persians of good will it may commemorate your rescue, and for your enemies may stand as a reminder of their ruin.

^{12v}₂₄ "Every city and, more generally, every country, which does not follow these instructions, will be mercilessly devastated with fire and sword, and made not only inaccessible to men but hateful to wild animals and even birds for ever."

¹³ The text of this edict, to be promulgated as law in each province, was published to the various peoples, so that the Jews could be ready on the day stated to avenge themselves on their enemies. •The couriers, mounted on the king's horses, set out in great haste and urgency at the king's command. The edict was also
¹⁴ published in the citadel of Susa. •Mordecai left the royal presence in a princely gown of violet and white, with a great golden crown and a cloak of fine linen
¹⁵ and purple. The city of Susa shouted for joy. •For the Jews there was light and gladness, joy and honor. •In every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and decree arrived, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and holidaymaking. Of the country's population many became Jews, since now the Jews were feared.

The great day of Purim

¹ **9** The king's command and decree came into force on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar, and the day on which the enemies of the Jews had hoped to crush them produced the very opposite effect: the Jews it was who crushed their enemies. ² In their towns throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the Jews assembled to strike at those who had planned to injure them. No one resisted them, since the various peoples were now all afraid of them. ³ Provincial administrators, satraps, governors and officers of the king, all supported the Jews for fear of Mordecai. ⁴ And indeed Mordecai was a power in the palace, and his fame was spreading through all the provinces; Mordecai was steadily growing more powerful.

⁵ So the Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, with resulting slaughter and destruction, and worked their will on their opponents. ⁶ In the citadel of Susa alone the Jews put five hundred men to death, notably Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, ⁸ Aridai and Jezatha, the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the persecutor of the Jews. But they took no plunder.

¹¹ The number of those killed in the citadel of Susa was reported the same day to the king, who said to Queen Esther, "In the citadel of Susa the Jews have killed five hundred men and also the ten sons of Haman. What must they have done in the other provinces of the realm? Tell me what you request; I grant it to you. ¹³ Tell me what else you desire; it is yours for the asking." "If such is the king's pleasure," Esther replied, "let the Jews of Susa be allowed to enforce today's decree tomorrow as well. And as for the ten sons of Haman, let their bodies ¹⁴ be hanged on the gallows." "Whereupon the king ordered this to be done; the edict was issued in Susa and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. ¹⁵ Thus the Jews of Susa reassembled on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed three hundred men in the city. But they took no plunder.

¹⁶ The other Jews who lived in the king's provinces also assembled to defend their lives and rid themselves of their enemies. They slaughtered seventy-five thousand of their opponents. But they took no plunder. ¹⁷ This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. On the fourteenth day they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness. ¹⁸ But for the Jews of Susa, who had assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth days, the fifteenth was the day they rested, making that a day of feasting and gladness. ¹⁹ This is why Jewish country people, those who live in undefended villages, keep the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day of gladness, feasting and holidaymaking, and exchange ^{19a} portions with one another, *whereas for those who live in cities the day of rejoicing and exchanging portions with their neighbors is the fifteenth day of Adar.*

V. THE FEAST OF PURIM

The official institution of the feast of Purim

²⁰ Mordecai committed these events to writing. Then he sent letters to all the ²¹ Jews throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, enjoining them to celebrate the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar every ²² year, as the days on which the Jews had rid themselves of their enemies, and the month in which their sorrow had been turned into gladness, and mourning into a holiday. He therefore told them to keep these as days of festivity and gladness when they were to exchange portions and make gifts to the poor.

²³ Once having begun to observe them, the Jews undertook to continue these ²⁴ practices about which Mordecai had written these words to them, "Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the persecutor of all the Jews, had plotted their destruction and had cast the pur, that is, the lot, for their overthrow and ruin.

25 But when he went again to the king to ask him to order the hanging of Mordecai, the wicked scheme which he had devised against the Jews recoiled on his own
 26 head, and both he and his sons were hanged on the gallows. "That is why these days were called Purim, from the word pur." And so, because of what was written in this letter, because of what they had seen for themselves and because of what
 27 had happened to them, the Jews vowed and took on themselves and their descendants and on all who should join them, to celebrate these two days without fail, in the manner prescribed and at the time appointed, year after year.
 28 Thus commemorated and celebrated from generation to generation, in each family, each province and each city, these days of Purim shall never be abrogated among the Jews, nor shall their memory die out among their race.
 29 Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, wrote with full authority to ratify
 30 this second letter, and sent letters to all the Jews of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the realm of Ahasuerus in terms of kindness and friendship
 31 enjoining them to observe these days of Purim at the appointed time, as Mordecai the Jew had recommended, and in the manner prescribed for themselves and their descendants, with additional ordinances for fasts and lamentations. The
 32 ordinance of Esther fixed this observance of Purim and it was recorded in writing.

Praise of Mordecai

1 **10** King Ahasuerus levied tribute from the continent and the islands of the
 2 sea. All his mighty acts of power and the account of the high honor to which he raised Mordecai, is not all this recorded in the Book of the Annals
 3 of the Kings of Media and Persia? How "Mordecai the Jew was next in rank to King Ahasuerus. He was a man held in respect among the Jews, esteemed by thousands of his brothers, a man who sought the good of his people and cared for the welfare of his entire race."
 10:4^{3a} *And Mordecai said, "All this is God's doing. I remember the dream I had about*
 3^c *these matters, nothing of which has failed to come true: the little spring that became a river, the light that shone, the sun, the flood of water. Esther is*
 3^d *the river—she whom the king married and made queen. The two dragons are*
 3^e *Haman and myself. The nations are those that banded together to blot out the*
 3^f *name of Jew. The single nation, mine, is Israel, those who cried out to God and*
 3^g *were saved. Yes, the Lord has saved his people, the Lord has delivered us from all these evils, God has worked such signs and great wonders as have never happened among the nations.*
 3^h *"Two destinies he appointed, one for his own people, one for the nations at*
 3ⁱ *large. And these two destinies were worked out at the hour and time and day laid down by God involving all the nations. In this way God has remembered his people*
 3^j *and vindicated his heritage; and for them these days, the fourteenth and fifteenth*
 3^k *of the month of Adar, are to be days of assembly, of joy and of gladness before God, through all generations and for ever among his people Israel."*

Note on the Greek translation of the book

11:1^{3l} In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who affirmed that he was a priest and Levite, and Ptolemy his son brought the foregoing letter concerning the Purim. They maintained it as being authentic, the translation having been made by Lysimachus son of Ptolemy, a member of the Jerusalem community.