**Praying with the women of the Old Testament**

**Session 4**

**QUOTE 1 Jdt 4:19, 21-22** **“**The people of Israel cried out to the Lord their God, for their courage failed, because all their enemies had surrounded them and they did not have enough water to drink their fill for a single day... Their children lost heart, and the women and young men fainted from thirst and fell down in the streets of the city; there was no strength left in them any longer.”

**QUOTE 2 Jdt 7:24-27** “ … you have done us a great injury in not making peace with the Assyrians.  God has sold us into their hands, to strew us on the ground before them with utter destruction. Now call them in and surrender the whole city ...  we will be slaves, but our lives will be spared, and we shall not witness the death of our babes before our eyes, or see our wives and children draw their last breath.”

**QUOTE 3 Jdt 7:30-31** **“**Have courage, my brothers! Let us hold out for five more days; by that time the Lord our God will restore to us his mercy, for he will not forsake us utterly. But if these days pass by, and no help comes for us, I will do what you say.”

**QUOTE 4 Jdt 8:5-7a, 8** **“**She set up a tent for herself on the roof of her house, and girded sackcloth about her loins and wore the garments of her widowhood. She fasted all the days of her widowhood, except the day before the sabbath and the sabbath itself … and the feasts and days of rejoicing of the house of Israel. She was beautiful in appearance, and had a very lovely face … No one spoke ill of her, for she feared God with great devotion.”

**QUOTE 5 Jdt 8:12-17** “Who are you, that have put God to the test this day? **…** You cannot plumb the depths of the human heart, nor find out what a man is thinking; how do you expect to search out God, who made all these things, and find out his mind or comprehend his thought? No, my brethren, do not provoke the Lord our God to anger. For if he does not choose to help us within these five days, he has power to protect us within any time he pleases, or even to destroy us in the presence of our enemies. Do not try to bind the purposes of the Lord our God; for God is not like man, to be threatened, nor like a human being, to be won over by pleading. Therefore, while we wait for his deliverance, let us call upon him to help us, and he will hear our voice, if it pleases him.”

**QUOTE 6 Jdt 8:25-27** **“**In spite of everything let us give thanks to the Lord our God, who is putting us to the test as he did our forefathers … the Lord scourges those who draw near to him, in order to admonish them.”

**QUOTE 7 Jdt 8:28-31** **“**All that you have said has been spoken out of a true heart, and there is no one who can deny your words… But the people were very thirsty and compelled us to take an oath which we cannot break. So pray for us, since you are a devout woman, and the Lord will send us rain to fill our cisterns and we will no longer be faint.”

**QUOTE 8 Jdt 8:32-35** **“**Listen to me. I am about to do a thing which will go down through all generations of our descendants. Stand at the city gate tonight, and I will go out with my maid; and within the days after which you have promised to surrender the city to our enemies, the Lord will deliver Israel by my hand. Only, do not try to find out what I plan; for I will not tell you until I have finished what I am about to do.’” Uzziah and the rulers said to her, ‘Go in peace, and may the Lord God go before you.”

**QUOTE 9 Jdt 9:4b, 11, 12, 14** “Then Judith fell upon her face, and put ashes on her head, and uncovered the sackcloth she was wearing; and … cried out to the Lord with a loud voice … ‘O God, my God, hear me also, a widow. … For Your power depends not upon numbers, nor … upon men of strength; for You are God of the lowly, helper of the oppressed, upholder of the weak, protector of the forlorn, savior of those without hope.’”

**QUOTE 10 Jdt 10:1-5** “When Judithhad ceased crying out to the God of Israel … she … went down into the house … and arrayed herself in her gayest apparel, which she used to wear while her husband Manas′seh was living. She put sandals on her feet and put on her anklets, bracelets, rings, earrings, and all her ornaments, and made herself very beautiful, to entice the eyes of all men who might see her. She gave her maid a bottle of wine and a flask of oil and filled a bag with parched grain, a cake of dried fruit, and fine bread; and she wrapped up all her vessels and gave them to her to carry.”

**QUOTE 11 Jdt 10:7-8** “When they saw her, and noted how her face was altered and her clothing changed, they greatly admired her beauty, and said to her, **‘**May the God of our fathers grant you favor and fulfil your plans, that the people of Israel may glory and Jerusalem may be exalted.’ And she worshiped God.”

**QUOTE 12 Jdt 10:13** “I am on my way to the presence of Holofernes the commander of your army, to give him a true report; and I will show him a way by which he can go and capture all the hill country without losing one of his men, captured or slain.”

**QUOTE 13 Jdt 10:14-16** “When the men heard her words, and observed her face—she was in their eyes marvelously beautiful—they said to her … Go at once to his tent; some of us will escort you and hand you over to him. And when you stand before him, do not be afraid in your heart, but tell him just what you have said, and he will treat you well.’”

**QUOTE 14 Jdt 10:19** “And they marveled at her beauty, and admired the Israelites, judging them by her, and every one said to his neighbor, ‘Who can despise these people, who have women like this among them? Surely not a man of them had better be left alive, for if we let them go they will be able to ensnare the whole world!’”

**QUOTE 15 Jdt 10:23** “And when Judith came into the presence of Holofernesand his servants, they all marveled at the beauty of her face; and she prostrated herself and made obeisance to him, and his slaves raised her up.”

**QUOTE 16 Jdt 11:16-19** “Therefore, when I, your servant, learned all this, I fled from them; and God has sent me to accomplish with you things that will astonish the whole world, as many as shall hear about them. For your servant is religious and serves the God of heaven day and night; therefore, my lord, I will remain with you, and every night your servant will go out into the valley pray to God. He will tell me when they have committed their sins.  I will come and tell you. Then you shall go out with your whole army, and not one of them will withstand you.”

**QUOTE 17 Jdt 12:15-16** “So she got up and arrayed herself in all her woman’s finery, and her maid went and spread on the ground for her before Holofernes the soft fleeces … that she might recline on them when she ate. Judith came in and lay down, and Holofernes’ heart was ravished with her and he was moved with great desire to possess her; for he had been waiting for an opportunity to deceive her, ever since the day he first saw her.”

**QUOTE 18 Jdt 13:4-5** “O Lord God of all might, look in this hour upon the work of my hands for the exaltation of Jerusalem. For now is the time to help Your inheritance, and to carry out my undertaking for the destruction of the enemies who have risen up against us.”

**QUOTE 19 Jdt 13:14** “ Praise God, O praise him! Praise God, who has not withdrawn his mercy from the house of Israel but has destroyed our enemies by my hand this very night!”

**QUOTE 20 Jdt 13:18-20** “Uzzi′ah said to her, ‘O daughter, you are blessed by the Most High God above all women on earth; and blessed be the Lord God, who … has guided you to strike the head of the leader of our enemies … May God grant this to be a perpetual honor to you … because you did not spare your own life when our nation was brought low, walking in the straight path before our God.’”

**QUOTE 21 Jdt 15:9-11** “You are the exaltation of Jerusalem, you are the great glory of Israel, you are the great pride of our nation! You have done all this singlehanded; you have done great good to Israel, and God is well pleased with it. May the Almighty Lord bless you forever!”

**QUOTE 22 Jdt 15:12-13 “**Then all the women of Israel gathered to see her, and blessed her, and some of them performed a dance for her … and she went before all the people in the dance, leading all the women, while all the men of Israel followed, bearing their arms and wearing garlands and with songs on their lips.”

**QUOTE 23 Jdt 16:6-7, 13-16** “I will sing to my God a new song: O Lord, You are great and glorious, wonderful in strength, invincible … to those who fear You, You will continue to show mercy… every sacrifice as a fragrant offering is a small thing, and all fat for burnt offerings to thee is a very little thing, but he who fears the Lord shall be great for ever.”

**QUOTE 24 Jd 16:25** “And no one ever again spread terror among the people of Israel in the days of Judith, or for a long time after her death.”

**QUOTE 25 Est 2:7** “[Mordecai] had brought up … Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother; the maiden was beautiful and lovely, and when her father and her mother died, he adopted her as his own daughter.”

**QUOTE 26 Est 4:14** “Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

**QUOTE 27 Est 4:16** “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.”

**QUOTE 28 Est** **14:1-4, 13-14, 19:** “O my Lord, You only are King; help me, who am alone and have no helper but You, for my danger is in my hand … O God, hear the voice of the despairing, and save us from the hands of evildoers. And save me from my fear!’”

**QUOTE 29 Est 15:2, 5, 6** “Then, majestically adorned, after invoking the aid of the all-seeing God and Savior, she took her two maids with her … She was radiant with perfect beauty and she looked happy, as if beloved, but her heart was frozen with fear.”

**QUOTE 30** “It is significant that the woman always figures in Israel’s thought and belief, not as priestess, but as prophetess and judge-savior… The powerless one becomes the savior because it is there that the locus for the revelation of God’s power is found.” (J. Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church’s Marian Belief*)

**QUOTE 31** “[True beauty is revealed] when ordinary women … reveal the gift of their womanhood by placing themselves at the service of others … in their greatness and limitations.” (St. John Paul II, *Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women*)

**Closing Prayer: “Father, Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light on our path. May it be done to us according to Your word.”**

**For Personal Application**

**Judith** lived a quiet widowhood devoted to fasting and prayer. Her devout life with God gave her eyes to see the foolishness of trying to tell Him what to do.

 Are you susceptible to wanting God to do what you think is best for you and those around you?

After her heroic moment, Judith returned to her life of prayer and fasting. She didn’t think of herself as someone special.

Do you think those close to you see that kind of humility in you?

**Esther** asked God to deliver her people from danger, as well as herself from fear.

Do you sometimes experience fear, even over relatively small things, that is so pervasive, it feels like an enemy from which you need deliverance?

Are you honest about this in your prayers to God?

We aren’t likely to face physical life and death situations in our lives with God, as both Judith and Esther did, BUT Jesus called us to daily choices between life and death as His disciples.

Our choice is whether to live or die for ourselves, our own wills, what we want for ourselves, others, our own plans. That’s where our battles are fought.

 Are you facing any battle like that today? If so, can you profit from the examples of the women we’ve studied?