

Study 41: Judith

Introduction. The *Book of Judith* is probably among the least read and least understood books of the Bible. Here are a few of the reasons why, each of which I hope to address later in this study guide:

- *Judith* is one of the deuterocanonical books, considered canonical by the Catholic Church, but not included in the Jewish and Protestant Old Testament canons. Few Protestants have read it.
- The book receives no direct mention in the New Testament, although St. Paul seems to quote the Greek text of *Judith* on several occasions. (More on this below.)
- *Judith* appears only rarely in our Lectionary, with just a few readings in common Masses and on occasional Marian feast days. Most Catholics have probably never heard a reading from Judith during Mass.
- Because of the book's apparent historical inaccuracies and anachronisms, many scholars consider *Judith* a work of fiction or, at best, a story in which the author uses historical events and personages as allegorical symbols to enhance the story and deepen the faith and hope of the reader.
- *Judith* includes several events that have led to more than a little controversy among moral theologians.

The *Book of Judith*, however, deserves to be read, studied, and enjoyed. Not only does it relate the wonderful story of a remarkably brave and resourceful woman, but it also proclaims a message that those who love the Lord must always trust in the Lord.

The book, consisting of 16 chapters, is usually divided into two main sections: (1) the Assyrian Threat and Siege [Jud 1-7]; and (2) Judith's Response that Leads to Victory [Jud 8-16]. But I think it is more useful to divide the narrative into several smaller sections:

1. The Assyrian Threat by "Nebuchadnezzar" [Jud 1:1-3:10]
2. The Siege of Bethulia by "Holofernes" [Jud 4:1-7:32]
3. Judith, Trust in the Lord [Jud 8:1-10:10]
4. Judith and Holofernes [Jud 10:11-13:20]
5. Victory over Assyria, Thanksgiving to God [Jud 14:1-16:25]

Reading. Open your Bible and read the Book of Judith. As you read the text, focus on the story, the main characters, their motivations, their strengths, and their weaknesses. Pay close attention to Judith's relationship with God and her understanding of His role in the lives of His people. At this point don't be distracted by any seeming inconsistencies or historical difficulties. We will address those later. Right now, we're interested primarily in the story and its message. After all, the Holy Spirit inspired *Judith's* unnamed author, so the story he wrote must have real and lasting value.

As I like to remind myself, the Bible wasn't written solely for Scriptural scholars; it was written for every single one of us. We should always listen to the Church as she opens the Word of God for us, for the Church is our inspired teacher. But you and I must prayerfully listen to the Holy Spirit as He reveals that same Word to each of us, calling us to a deeper relationship with our God through Jesus Christ.

The Book and its Author. Not only don't we know who wrote the *Book of Judith*, but we also don't know when it was written. Today we have Greek and Latin versions of the book, although they differ considerably. St. Jerome (347-419 A.D.) claims to have made a hurried translation of *Judith* from a version written in Chaldean (an Aramaic dialect), but adds that he did not translate literally, striving instead to offer the sense of the work. There are two known Hebrew texts, but these, too, differ greatly, one much longer than the other. St. Jerome assumed that the Greek Septuagint translation and longer Hebrew version are closest to the original.

Even though *Judith* was almost certainly originally written in Hebrew, because the earliest known versions of are in Greek, the book was not included in the Hebrew Bible. Protestants, following the Jewish lead, also exclude it from their canon. The Catholic Church, however, has long considered *Judith* inspired and includes it in the canon of Sacred Scripture.

Virtually all of the Early Church Fathers – e.g., St. Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, St. Hilary, St. John Chrysostom, Origen, and Tertullian, among others – referred to *Judith* in their writings and considered the book an inspired history relating the true story of a valiant woman who delivered God's people from a cruel tyrant.

Some scholars also suspect that St. Paul referred to Judith several times in his 1st Letter to the Corinthians. For example, compare these verses where St. Paul quoted Isaiah, but also seems to refer to Judith:

But as it is written: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him," this God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God" [1 Cor 2:9-10]

"You cannot plumb the depths of the human heart or grasp the workings of the human mind; how then can you fathom God, who has made all these things, or discern his mind, or understand his plan?" [Jud 8:14]

And compare as well...

Let us not test Christ as some of them did, and suffered death by serpents [1 Cor 10:9].

Besides all this, let us give thanks to the Lord our God for putting us to the test as He did our ancestors [Jud 8:25].

As we might imagine, scholars do not agree on the origin of *Judith*. Some believe it was written in the 2nd century B.C., during the time of the Maccabees when it offered a powerful message that inspired faith and trust in God during a time of great trial. The book's apparently imprecise history, as well as its style and language, could certainly point to the time of the Maccabees. Other scholars agree but, influenced by the extent

of the personal and societal detail found in the book, maintain the story was based on real events and people of a traditional story dating from earlier times. They believe it was then “rewritten” to appeal to a later audience.

Despite *Judith*'s historical anomalies, the Church has long avoided calling it a book of fiction, preferring instead to focus on the book's message and the fact that its events and themes are all drawn from various times of Old Testament history. *Judith* will always retain its powerful religious significance and cannot, at least at present, be entirely dismissed as a work of fiction.

We have neither the space nor the time here, but several scholars have presented interesting evidence for the historical accuracy of the narrative, including both the timeline of the story and the names of many of the main characters. And almost every year new archaeological and textual discoveries lead to increased understanding of the accuracy of the Old Testament writings. Many discoveries still await us, and some might well make the historicity of the *Book of Judith* much more likely. I certainly would not bet against it.

The Times. Most of the events described occur in Judah, in an unknown city called Bethulia, a place of which we have no record. Chronologically the story seems to take place some years following the return from exile (538 B.C.) when Israel was struggling to reestablish itself as a nation, although under Persian control. Some scholars dispute this timing and believe the events in the story followed a different exile.

A this point it might be useful to present a brief history and timeline of the empires of the ancient Middle East as we try to place the Book of Judith into historical perspective.

- The great Assyrian Empire, plagued by internal civil wars and under attack from several quarters – by the Medes (Persians), Babylonians (Chaldeans), and Scythians (Cimmerians) – finally collapsed when Nineveh, its capital, was destroyed in 612 B.C. The entire empire ceased to exist just a few years later. The Assyrians, of course, were responsible for the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, in 722 B.C. and the subsequent exile of the surviving population.
- With Assyria gone, the Babylonian Empire rose to ascendancy, and under its second king, Nebuchadnezzar (reign 605-562 B.C.), achieved its greatest glory. He was the king who destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and brought about the Babylonian Captivity. The empire came to an end when Babylon was captured by the Persians under Cyrus, who then released the Jews from their Captivity in 538 B.C.
- Cyrus, known as Cyrus the Great (reign ca. 560-530 B.C.) was the man who brought about the initial growth of the Persian Empire, embracing virtually all of the ancient Middle East. He was unique in many respects, but especially in his tolerance of the customs and religions of the lands he conquered. The Jews were among the beneficiaries as Cyrus allowed them to return to their homeland and rebuild Jerusalem and its Temple.

The famous Nebuchadnezzar was, of course, Babylonian not Assyrian, but the author may have decided to use his name because of that king's earlier devastating destruction of Judah would strike a chord with the reader. Another possibility, offered by a number of scholars, refers to a common practice among those in the ancient Middle East. Some leaders, to enhance their own fame would assume the name of a famous predecessor, and Nebuchadnezzar would certainly be an obvious choice. Because Holofernes and Bagoas are likely Persian names, these same scholars believe the events took place during a time of Persian ascendancy. But the book's place in history is really secondary to the message it imparts to us as we struggle to remain faithful to God in the present day.

We'll now look at the highlights of the *Book of Judith*. Briefly, the book tells the story of the remarkable and ignominious defeat of an entire Assyrian army solely because of the courageous actions of a single Jewish woman, whose name was Judith. I intend to address only key points of the narrative that I believe should be emphasized without retelling the entire story which is best provided by the book itself.

The Assyrian Threat by Nebuchadnezzar [Jud 1:1-3:10]. The story begins with Assyrian King Nebuchadnezzar plotting revenge against those states that failed to assist him his war against the Medes. He called on his ranking general, Holofernes, to form a great army of proven troops and mounted archers. Nebuchadnezzar's wrath, as well as his exalted opinion of himself, are apparent in his instructions to Holofernes:

This says the great king, the lord of all the earth... Their wounded will fill their ravines and wadies, the swelling river will be choked with their dead; and I will deport them as exiles to the very ends of the earth. Go before me and take possession of all their territories for me. If they surrender to you, guard them for me until the day of their sentencing. As for those who disobey, show them no mercy, but deliver them up to slaughter and plunder in all the land you occupy [Jud 2:5,8-11].

From these words alone, we learn the kind of man this Nebuchadnezzar was.

Holofernes began his campaign of utter destruction, taking revenge on all who had displeased Nebuchadnezzar. His forces completely devastated Put and Lud, Mesopotamia, Cilicia, Midian, Damascus, so that "fear and dread of him fell upon all the inhabitants of the coastland" [Jud 2:28]. As a result, many of these cities and nations sued for peace:

"We, the servants of Nebuchadnezzar the great king, lie prostrate before you; do with us as you will" [Jud 3:2].

Although the people received Holofernes and his army with "*garlands and dancing to the sound of music,*" the general devastated their lands. His army also destroyed all temples and sacred places demanding that the people worship only Nebuchadnezzar as their god. Holofernes then sets up camp on the approaches to the Judean hills in order to replenish his army before attacking Judah.

On a first reading, without knowing how the story will end, at this point the reader is certain of one thing: God cannot be pleased with Nebuchadnezzar or his general, Holofernes. These are not good people, and they are about to attack God's Chosen

Ones. Knowing how His people often rebelled against Him, we wonder whether their faith in God's love for them is strong as they face this most dangerous enemy.

The Siege of Bethulia by Holofernes [Jud 4:1-7:32.] Knowing what Holofernes had already done, the Judeans were understandably afraid, but out of concern *“for Jerusalem and the Temple of the Lord, their God”* [Jud 4:2], they prepared for war. All of Israel – men, women, children, aliens, workers, slaves, domestic animals – donned sackcloth, sprinkled themselves with ashes and fasted. The people *“cried out to the Lord with all their strength to look with favor on the whole house of Israel”* [Jud 4:15].

Holofernes called a war council and asked his Canaanite allies about these Israelites. Achior, leader of the Ammonites, related Israelite history from Abraham to Egypt and Moses, to their conquest of the Promised Land, and then their captivity and their return and resettlement. He then added:

“So now, my master and lord, if these people are inadvertently at fault, or if they are sinning against their God, and if we verify this offense of theirs, then we will be able to go up and conquer them. But if they are not a guilty nation, then let my lord keep his distance; otherwise, their Lord and God will shield them, and we will be mocked in the eyes of all the earth” [Jud 5:20-21].

This insight, central and crucial to the story, simply infuriated Holofernes who had no fear of the seemingly powerless Israelites. His reply says it all:

“Who is God beside Nebuchadnezzar? He will send his force and destroy them from the face of the earth. Their God will not save them...we, the servants of Nebuchadnezzar, will strike them down with one blow...their mountains shall be drunk with their blood, and their plains filled with their corpses. Not a trace of them shall survive our attack; they will utterly perish. So says King Nebuchadnezzar, lord of all the earth” [Jud 6:2-4].

Achior was bound and sent to the Israelite camp where Holofernes expected to destroy him along with the Israelites. Received kindly, he acquainted the Israelite leaders with all that had happened. That night all of Bethulia *“called upon the God of Israel for help”* [Jud 6:21].

The next day Holofernes ordered his entire army to move against Bethulia. They surrounded the city, cut off its water supply, and laid siege to the city. As the cisterns ran dry the people cried out to the elders:

“You have done us a grave injustice in not making peace with the Assyrians” [Jud 7:24].

They continue in their lament, sounding very much like the Israelites of Exodus. Uzziah, their leader, responds, seeking more time and hoping that God will act:

“Courage, my brothers and sisters! Let us endure patiently, five days more for the Lord our God to show mercy toward us; for God will not utterly forsake us. But if these days pass and help does not come to us, I will do as you say” [Jud 7:30-31].

The city faces conflict both without and within. We are left in suspense, wondering how this potentially destructive crisis will be resolved. Is Uzziah right? Will God not forsake them? How and through whom will He act?

Judith, Trust in the Lord [Jud 8:1-10:10] Chapter eight opens with the genealogy of a woman named Judith, one that stretches back many generations to Simeon, son of Israel (Jacob). The genealogy of a woman is unique in the Old Testament. We are also told she has lived as a widow for over three years since the death of her husband, Manasseh. Although wealthy and beautiful, she continued to fast, wearing sackcloth and widow's clothing. Perhaps most telling are these last words describing her:

"No one had a bad word to say about her, for she feared God greatly" [Jud 8:8].

The appearance of Judith is perfectly timed, and the story now centers on her. Having heard of the people's fears and the elders' decision, Judith invited the elders to her home, where she berated them for their lack of faith and trust in God, and especially for placing limits on God's freedom to intervene:

"Who are you to put God to the test today, setting yourselves in the place of God in human affairs? ...Do not impose conditions on the plans of the Lord our God...Therefore, my brothers, let us set an example for our kindred. Their lives depend on us, and the defense of the sanctuary, the temple, and the altar rests with us" [Jud 8:12,16,24].

Uzziah acknowledged her wisdom but reminded her that he had promised the people to act in five days. He asked Judith to pray for rain to fill up the cisterns.

Judith, though, replied to this with a remarkable prophecy and request:

"Listen to me! I will perform a deed that will go down from generation to generation among our descendants. Stand at the city gate tonight to let me pass through with my maid...the Lord will deliver Israel by my hand...I will not tell you what I am doing until it is accomplished" [Jud 8:32-34]

This is followed by Judith's prayer [Jud 9] in which she offered God her weakness as a weapon for the destruction of an enemy that planned to profane and defile God's sanctuary. And yet she also showed confidence that God has complete control of the destiny of His people. Knowing only God can accomplish the impossible, her plea came straight from the heart:

"Crush their arrogance by the hand of a female. Your strength is not in numbers, nor does your might depend upon the powerful. You are God of the lowly, helper of those of little account, supporter of the weak, protector of those in despair, savior of those without hope" [Jud 9:10-11].

Judith then prepared for war as only she could, using her beauty as a weapon. Bathed, anointed, elegantly dressed, and bejeweled, she knew she would attract the attention of any man who saw her, especially Holofernes.

Judith and Holofernes [Jud 10:11-13:20] Judith and her maid left Bethulia and were taken into custody by an enemy patrol. She stated her case, that she had come to see

their general because she was fleeing from the Hebrews and would give him “a trustworthy report.” Overcome by her beauty, they escorted the two women to the tent of Holofernes. Indeed, all who encountered her marveled at her beauty, including the general himself. Some of his men uttered what turned out to be another prophecy:

“Who can despise this people who have such women among them? It is not good to leave one of their men alive, for if any were to be spared, they could beguile the whole earth” [Jud 10:19]

Brought before Holofernes, Judith *“fell prostrate and paid homage to him, but his servants raised her up”* [Jud 10:23].

At first meeting between Judith and Holofernes [Jud 11], the general, obviously beguiled, assured Judith that no harm would come to her. Judith related a convincing story, flattering both Holofernes and his king and convincing the general that he will have no difficulty defeating the Israelites. Pleased with her report, he unwittingly but prophetically told Judith that she will “be renowned throughout the whole world” [Jud 11:23].

Having brought her own food with her, Judith explained that for religious dietary reasons she could not dine with Holofernes. When he expressed concern that she might run out of her specially prepared food, she replied:

“As your soul lives, my lord, your servant will not use up the things I have with me before the Lord carries out by my hand what He has determined to do” [Jud 12:4].

As Judith hoped, Holofernes predictably misunderstood her double meaning and assumed “Lord” referred only to him and not to the God of Israel.

Judith had no trouble gaining authorization to make nightly trips to the valley of Bethulia to pray and wash in the spring. Although she flirted with Holofernes, she took pains to do nothing that would infringe on her religious identity as a faithful Jew. But she faced a deadline of just a few days, so the suspense builds until the fourth day when things began to happen at an alarming rate.

We are not surprised that Holofernes intended to take advantage of Judith, and he prepared a special banquet just for himself and his immediate staff, in his words:

“It would bring shame on us to be with such a woman without enjoying her. If we do not seduce her, she will laugh at us” [Jud 12:12].

When invited, Judith once again spoke with double meaning in her reply to Bagoas, Holofernes’ servant:

“Who am I to refuse my Lord? Whatever is pleasing to him I will promptly do. This will be a joy to me until the day of my death” [Jud 12:14].

Holofernes, though, drank far too much wine and fell to his bed in a drunken stupor. The servants left Judith alone with the unconscious general. Standing at his bedside, she prayed for strength and for God’s support. Then, using Holofernes’ own sword, Judith decapitated him. She and her maid placed his head into the food bag and followed their usual nightly routine to depart for prayer in the valley. But this time they returned to

Bethulia and entered the gates. Praising God, Judith displayed the head of Holofernes which she had obtained with neither “sin nor shame.” The city’s leaders and people were filled with praise for God.

Note: “Judith with the Head of Holofernes” was painted by Cristofano Allori (c. 1615) and hangs in the Galleria Palatina in Florence. Next time you’re there, check it out.



Victory and Thanksgiving [Jud 14:1-16:25]. Judith went on to exhibit some military expertise of her own and instructed that the general’s head must be hung on the parapet. She then told all able-bodied men to grab their weapons and prepare to attack the Assyrians at dawn. She knew that when they realized their leader was dead, killed by a Hebrew woman, they would panic and retreat in chaos. In the meantime, Achior was called to identify the head as belonging to Holofernes. He was so amazed he decided to be circumcised and converted to Judaism.

When the Assyrians discovered their general’s body, headless and on the floor in disgrace, the entire army descended into chaos and fled. The Israelites attacked the fleeing Assyrians, slaughtering them, and plundered their camp, taking all the spoils.

In these final chapters the reader can share in the delight of the Israelites, freed from the dire threat that had faced them. The high priest, the elders, the leaders in Jerusalem, indeed, all the people rejoice in Judith and bless her [Jud 15:9-14].

The book concludes with Judith singing praise and thanksgiving to God [Jud 16:1-17] followed by a brief description of her remaining years and the death at the age of 105.

Themes of Judith. Several themes drive the story of Judith, making it among the more memorable stories of the Old Testament. Because of space we’ll just examine a few of these themes.

Contrast. This is perhaps the most obvious theme in Judith. The wealth, power, and military strength of the Assyrians and Medes are contrasted with the military weakness and relative poverty of the Israelites. This tiny country’s only apparent strength is their faith and trust in the God of Israel.

To emphasize this contrast, we are presented with a brutal, but powerful general, the leader of a huge, successful army. And who will lead the Israelites? A woman who is also a widow. Judith herself realizes this disparity and highlights it several times in her prayer [Jud 9:10,12] and her song of thanksgiving [Jud 16:5-6]. This theme of Judith’s weakness actually dominates much of the last half of the book.

Another far more important contrast is that between the power of God and the arrogance of human beings. Judith's weakness, for example, becomes a sign of God's power, in that He makes use of human weakness to accomplish his will. Judith is successful because the God of the humble works through her. Compared to the manifest power of God, the arrogance of the enemy becomes almost laughable. This theme, of course, permeates the Old Testament, in which the power of God protects His people:

"For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the Lord, our God, is to us whenever we call upon Him? [Dt 7:8]

The people of Israel learn that Judith's strength, and that of her nation, can come only through absolute trust in the God of their ancestors. When faith is strong and steady God will work through His people.

This contrast is taken to a human level when we compare the story's two main characters: Judith and Holofernes. Judith is depicted as a woman of courage, faith, trust, and wisdom, values especially needed during this challenging time. In contrast, Holofernes is shown to be pompous, power hungry, vain, and pleasure seeking. Judith's physical beauty mirrors that of her soul while Holofernes desires only to possess her beauty for his own pleasure. Judith's wisdom enables her to use flattery successfully on this man whose vanity blinds him to the subtlety of her plan. Unarmed and unprotected we see a woman in complete control of the situation.

Years ago, I taught a course for executives on negotiating techniques. I actually used Judith as an example of what I called "the power of no power." Judith applied her beauty and wisdom as weapons to defeat an enemy who could not fathom that such weapons even existed. Blinded by his vanity and position he saw only weakness.

We encounter another contrast, one between guilt and innocence. For example, the nations on whom Nebuchadnezzar plotted revenge seemed innocent. Although they hadn't supported him, neither had they opposed him. His aggression against them, however, appeared to be more important to him than the original war against the Medes. This contrast is brought out more clearly through the brutality of Holofernes versus the innocence of the Israelites. In truth, Achior's report to Holofernes [Jud 5:20-21], a report that so angered the general, presented this contrast most clearly.

Finally, we encounter the contrast of Judith's godliness and the enemy's arrogant ungodliness. Nebuchadnezzar claimed to be a god – "the lord of all the earth" – and carried out the destruction of all temples and sacred places...

"...so that every nation might worship only Nebuchadnezzar, and all their tongues and tribes should invoke him as a god" [Jud 3:8].

Holofernes, of course, gladly reaped the benefits of being this powerful king's key subordinate. He was very willing to conduct a campaign of terror and revenge, leaving behind a trail of destruction and death.

In contrast, Judith lived a life of faith and fear of the Lord. She obeyed the Law and, since the death of her husband, fasted and repented. Her faith in the one, true God, the

God of Israel, led her to pray in humility for strength at every crucial moment, and in thanksgiving for all that God has done through her.

Judith's Role: Leader, Soldier, and Spy. In the book's first half, we encounter the people of Bethulia. They were unsure of themselves and fearful of what might befall them. Trying to sustain their faith in God, they hoped He would save them from impending disaster. Although the city's leaders and the people did what was needed to prepare for war, their hearts were not in it. Indeed, as conditions worsened the people actually encouraged their leaders to surrender. The city, in effect, was leaderless as it awaited a miraculous saving act by God, some kind of major theophany that would destroy the enemy.

But then Judith appeared on the scene and immediately assumed multiple roles. First, she had to fill the leadership vacuum and took charge during her meeting with the city's elders. After chastising them for their lack of faith, she encouraged them to accept all that God wants to accomplish through them. But it is primarily through her that "the Lord will deliver Israel" [Jud 8:33].

To accomplish this and fulfill the Lord's plan, Judith realizes she must accept the demanding roles of both soldier and spy. She also understands that to help God save His people she must use some unorthodox methods. As any soldier or spy would do, she applied her particular strengths to deceive the enemy and, when given the opportunity, destroyed him in an act of violence that equated to societal self-defense. Afterwards, as she sang her song of thanksgiving, she prayed that all was done for the glory of God:

*"her beauty captivated his mind,
the sword cut through his neck!
...O Lord, great are you and glorious,
marvelous in power and unsurpassable"* [Jud 16:9,13].

...certainly an interesting juxtaposition of human actions in support of God's glory.

The means of Holofernes' death might seem brutal when viewed through the prism of our modern sensibilities, but those were perilous times when genocidal campaigns were common. In truth, though, for over a century our world has been plagued by similar evils and evildoers, as evidenced by the threats of both the National Socialists of Nazi Germany and the Communists of the Soviet Union, China, and elsewhere.

Totalitarianism in all its insidious forms always strives to turn the world away from God in an ultimately vain attempt to create little gods that never last.

From a military perspective, particularly when viewed through the eyes of those who have served in combat, the story supports the Church's teaching that warfare, although always regrettable, is sometimes necessary. In one sense, *Judith* tells the story of one soldier who, in a fight for her people's survival, defeated another soldier whose goal was the utter and brutal destruction of those same people.

However we try to come to grips with the violence depicted in *Judith*, the conflict described in its pages continued to be played out in the centuries that followed, and

remains with us today. The story, while it reflects the time, places, and people of an earlier age, sends a message that resonates with every age.

Questions. Here are a few questions on the *Book of Judith*, thanks to Ignatius Press:

1. [Jud 6:19] How does this prayer relate to circumstances today? What kind of arrogance and humiliation do Christians face today? What does it mean to ask God to “look upon the faces” of those who are praying?
2. [Ju 7:19] Have you ever reached a “point of extreme desperation” when faced with a problem? Did your desperation affect your trust that the Lord would hear your prayer?
3. [Jud 8:25] Judith encourages the elders to give thanks to God for putting them to the test. Why should we be grateful when God tests our faith and perseverance? [Read Heb 12:5-7] What are the benefits of divine discipline?
4. [Jud 13:4-5] How did you manage to accomplish some highly unpleasant duty? Did prayer play any part? How would you change your actions?
5. [Jud 14:10] Was there a time when you came to believe firmly in God? What happened that convinced you? How has your relationship with God grown since?

What other questions would you ask?